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LOOKING FORWARD TOGETHER: THREE STUDIES OF ARTISTIC PRACTICE IN THE SOUTH, 1920-1940

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LOOKING FORWARD TOGETHER: THREE STUDIES OF ARTISTIC PRACTICE IN THE SOUTH, 1920-1940

by

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On my first day of graduate school, I met a young and enthusiastic Latin Americanist from New Jersey. Our shared interests placed us in each other's paths, but his ability to make me laugh kept us in close company. I have found the partner, friend, and colleague in whom my soul delights. The last word goes to Michael Wellen, with love.

Looking Forward Together:
Three Studies of Artistic Practice in the South, 1920-1940

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Supervisor: Ann M. Reynolds

In this dissertation, I provide three studies of artistic practice in the era of the Great Depression. In each chapter, I write about a different set of artists working in the southeastern United States: I write about Walker Evans and the artistic and literary community located in the French Quarter of New Orleans, Louisiana (1926-1941); Edwin and Elise Harleston and their portrait studio in Charleston, South Carolina (1922-1931); and Bill Traylor and the artists who founded the New South Gallery and Art School in Montgomery, Alabama (1939-1940). Drawing from public and private archival collections, I consider how these artists made works that represented the South while they also made connections with artists and visual communities elsewhere; these connections placed them in dialogue with artists of the Harlem Renaissance, of American Regionalism, and of the Mexican Mural Movement. Although the artists in each chapter were from different Southern cities, they shared similar interests in the importance of developing and participating in artistic community.

I situate each study in this dissertation in relation to a type of artistic practice. These types of artistic practice—documentary, portraiture, and exhibition—served as loci for Southern artists' ideas about time and place. Southern studies have been haunted by

the idea that the South always looks backward, to the past. In these three studies, I consider how Southern artists and their contemporaries in other places took different approaches to referencing the past and imagining a future for the South. The works made by these Southern artists—which are linked by their complicated relationships to race, history, and place—are largely absent from histories of American and 20th century art. Their absence tells us much about the stakes behind history writing. By bringing these studies into dialogue with other, existing, art historical contexts and communities, I trace how historical absence is constructed and why such absences are important to consider. The works in this dissertation are also linked by their difference from a kind of Modernism; in their multiple and discrepant modernisms, the artists in this dissertation made work which was both modern and not-modern, which looked backward while pushing forward.

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Looking Backward, Looking Forward

or Making Paintings on the Drawing Room Walls

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs…[1]
> - CLIFFORD GEERTZ, *THE INTERPRETATION OF CULTURES*

> Before knowing what history says of a society, we have to analyze how history functions within it. [Place] makes possible certain researches through the fact of common conjunctures and problematics. … Taking the place seriously is the condition that allows something to be stated that is neither legendary (or 'edifying') nor atopical (lacking relevance).[2]
> - MICHEL DE CERTEAU, *THE WRITING OF HISTORY*

In 1934, Josephine Crawford marked out large squares on her drawing room walls and began to cover the patterned wallpaper with pastel, charcoal, and watercolor washes. In the squares, she painted large-scale images of her ancestors and family members. These paintings reflect the poses of photographic portraiture in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and Crawford titled the works with their subjects' names. In *Charles Henderson with His Nurse, Francis Gains* (Figure 1), Crawford paints her nephew sitting with his nurse and holding a ball in his lap. She situates both figures so they face the viewer, although she has drawn their facial features loosely. The nurse's face has thin lines which suggest eyes, nose, and mouth. The boy's face is smudged out almost entirely, with dark spots where eyes and mouth might be. In *Agatha Bienvenu Seated with Cane* (Figure 2), Crawford paints a woman with white hair seated in a high-backed chair.

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[1] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

[2] Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 68-69.

A black cane with a gold handle rests across her lap. Her dress evinces the mid-19th century: she wears a large skirt and billowy red jacket with broad black collar. A thin black line traces her right eye and eyebrow. On the left side of her face, Crawford has used the line to show only the arch of her eyebrow, which hooks into the line that indicates the bridge of her nose. Her hands appear claw-like, and perhaps gloved. In *Charles Campbell Crawford and His Grandfather* (Figure 2), Crawford portrays a man dressed in a 19th century-period suit and overcoat, standing with one foot forward, as if he were about to walk out of the picture. Behind his left shoulder, an erasure indicates a ghostly figure. This figure's hand connects with that of the young man (presumably, from the title, Charles Campbell Crawford, who was Josephine's father). The ghost figure also grasps a walking stick, mirroring the frontal figure's accessory and stance. Behind them, Crawford leaves the pictorial space blank, except for two perpendicular black lines which indicate some type of architectural space, perhaps the corner of a room. There are a total of eight ancestor paintings, including also one of an aunt, an unidentified woman, an aunt with a man identified as a suitor, two Crawford sisters with their governess, and Crawford's mother.

Because Crawford painted images of her ancestors and family members directly on the walls, we might consider these works as evocations of Crawford's antebellum Southern heritage. Or, because she draws from photographic conventions of portraiture, we might compare the images to family photographs or, collectively, to albums, which document a family's past. We could interpret Crawford's imagery as a look backward in

order to avoid the problems of her present.[3] Perhaps, this argument would continue, Crawford preferred to create images that avoided such contemporary difficulties. Like many wealthy white New Orleanians of her time, the then-56-year-old Crawford lived in a home that had been in her family for generations, surrounded by family heirlooms.[4] Located at 612 Royal Street, the home had been purchased by Josephine's grandfather in 1839. Painting the walls with images of her ancestors, then, could be Crawford's insistent demonstration of her New Orleans heritage, her place as a Southerner, her emphasis upon her family's local history. It could indicate her own process of taking possession of this heritage, and of her family home.

If we were to take such an approach to Crawford's images—a looking backward approach—we might also connect them to several contemporaneous films and novels which cast the antebellum South as an idyllic pre-industrial world. When *Gone With the Wind* was published in 1936, it was an instant bestseller, and it has subsequently sold over 30 million copies. The film, which opened in 1939, drew enormous crowds of viewers.[5] In the face of the Great Depression, the fantasy of the antebellum South for

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[3] In 1938 President Franklin Roosevelt would characterize the South as the nation's "No. 1" economic problem, and the region's economic, social, and agricultural problems were chronicled extensively throughout the decade.

[4] Louise Hoffman describes Crawford's family home in detail. She writes, "Josephine lived with a mix of furniture acquired over the years—Victorian chairs, a secretary with pigeon holds, armoires (there were no closets), and small French side tables that could be used anywhere. A wicker table and potted palm placed at the foot of the stairs gave the illusion of coolness when there was none." Louise C. Hoffman, *Josephine Crawford: An Artist's Vision* (New Orleans: Historic New Orleans Collection, 2009), 87.

[5] For an expanded analysis of the South in popular culture, see Karen L. Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011) or Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

whites could be seen as an escape from the complicated world of the present. And yet, for all of the glitter of Scarlett's social world at Tara, as the plot of *Gone With the Wind* continues through the Civil War, viewers and readers witnessed Margaret Mitchell's descriptions of that world as it crumbled. In *Gone With the Wind,* Scarlett nurses dying soldiers as Atlanta is attacked by Sherman's armies, and she escapes the city to find Tara abandoned and most of her family dead. Determined to survive despite the surrounding chaos, she repeats to herself "After all, tomorrow is another day."[6] At her darkest moments, as the untenable world of her past dissolves, Scarlett looks away from the present, toward the future.

In her drawing-room paintings, Crawford smudged out Charles Henderson's face, and she used loose approximations of three-dimensional space behind her figures. Her style appears unfinished, flat, and often awkward, even self-taught. Combined with her visual approach to the works, their placement—directly on top of her historic home's wallpaper—also suggests the artist's conception of herself as a Modernist. Crawford studied with André Lhote in Paris in 1927 and 1928, and she considered herself part of a community of likeminded artists and writers in Paris. In a 1965 retrospective exhibition of Crawford's work, hosted by the Isaac Delgado Museum of Art (the present-day New Orleans Museum of Art), Crawford's paintings were shown with the work of her "friends": Derain, Dufy, Gleizes, Léger, Lhote, Metzinger, Picabia, Segonzac, and Picasso—all Modernists who had exhibited in Paris galleries while Crawford was studying at the Académie Lhote. Crawford's drawing room paintings relate to her

[6] Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind* (New York: Warner Books, 1936), 1047.

training in Paris. In their style, they evoke Modernist conventions of using the materials of art to draw attention to these materials themselves rather than to the artist's subject matter. By applying such an aesthetic approach to images of her ancestors, Crawford created something like Margaret Mitchell's temporal proposition for Scarlett: that even as the past lingered in white Southerners' memories in the 1930s, it was altered considerably by the realities of the present. "If Josephine looked backward, she also looked forward," writes Louise Hoffman, in her biography of Crawford.[7] Here Hoffman's statement refers to Crawford's style, suggesting that through it—and its relationship to Modernism—Crawford imagined the future. Crawford's paintings look insistently to the past and to her present: they look backward, and they also survey her surroundings. They propose a tension between the past and present; perhaps that tension indicates, as Hoffman argues, that Crawford was looking anxiously forward, to the future. In the case studies of this dissertation, I find that many Southern artists, white and black, were sensitive to their region's past, while they were also keenly absorbing the ideas of their present. Upon incorporating those ideas into their Southern context, they made both strange—and they looked for what might come next.

[7] Hoffman, *Josephine Crawford*, 60.

ON TIME AND THE 1930S

Edward Bellamy (1850-1898), the late 19th century novelist whose utopian fiction *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* was the second best-selling book of the century after *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, wrote substantially about the malleability and the power of time.[8] In his political writings, he was an advocate for major reductions in the work day: Bellamy called for a five-day work week, with four hours of work each day (a dramatic proposition, given the prevalence of six-day work weeks, with ten hours of work each day). Bellamy believed that the work day—time's domination over the laborer—destroyed human creativity. In his 1898 short story, "With Eyes Shut," Bellamy's protagonist falls asleep and dreams he has awakened in a new world, one in which a technological device (startlingly similar to a "smart phone") mediates all human communication. In this world, not only do clocks speak, but they also tell different kinds of time than that of the work clock: "There were religious and sectarian clocks, moral clocks, philosophical clocks, freethinking and infidel clocks, literary and poetical clocks, educational clocks, frivolous and bacchanalian clocks…. As for the literary clocks, their number and variety were endless."[9] The example of the diverse clocks illustrates an idea that I find useful for approaching the case studies within this dissertation: that the artists I

[8] Interestingly, Bellamy (like Harriet Beecher Stowe) was from New England. He was born at Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts in 1850. Part of a generation that grew up during the years of the Civil War, Bellamy was fascinated by the South and several of his stories combine his interest in ghost stories and time travel with reflections on the war and its many legacies of trauma.

[9] Edward Bellamy, *The Blindman's World and Other Stories* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1898), 347-348.

study used their work to propose different ways of thinking about their own times. Some of those projects were progressive and, in others the artists looked longingly toward the aesthetic and social world of the past.

Another of Bellamy's short stories, "The Old Folks Party," describes a group of friends, all in their 20s, who decide to have a party in which they dress as older versions of themselves:

> "You mean a sort of ghost party," said she finally; "ghosts of the future, instead of ghosts of the past."
> "That's it exactly," answered he. "Ghosts of the future are the only sort worth heeding. Apparitions of things past are a very unpractical sort of demonology, in my opinion, compared with apparitions of things to come."[10]

The point of the party was to reminisce about the past (their present) and to see themselves across time, both forward (imagining themselves as "old folks") and backward (seeing their 20-year-old selves from the vantage of old age). As they plan the party, the characters lose track of time and realize that it is already after midnight: "Well," remarks one of the characters, "it was to be expected we should get a little mixed as to chronology over such talk as this."[11] Over the course of the following week, the characters develop their costumes, plan for their conversations, and practice their gestures and walk:

> As each one studied his or her part and strove in imagination to conceive how they would act and feel as old men and old women, they grew more interested, and more sensible of the mingled pathos and absurdity of the project, and its decided general effect of queerness. … Before the end of the week, the

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[10] Edward Bellamy, "The Old Folks Party," in *The Blindman's World and Other Stories* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1898), 61.

[11] Ibid., 69.

> occupation of their minds with the subject of old age produced a singular effect. They began to regard every event and feeling from a double standpoint, as present and as past, as it appeared to them and as it would appear to an old person.[12]

This effect of "queerness" and the ability to consider events and feelings from a "double standpoint, as present and as past" is what I have in mind in this dissertation, as I write about artists who were engaged in dynamic temporal projects. Many of these artists felt a "general effect of queerness," and occasionally described this sensation of being out of step with the changes taking place around them. This was a feeling exacerbated by constructions of Southern regional identity, which frequently emphasized memory and commemoration, even (especially) in the face of industrialization and modernization.[13]

In Bellamy's novel *Looking Backward*, his protagonist Julian West falls into a dream in which he travels across time, to the year 2000.[14] In his description of the year 2000, West narrates the social revolutions that have brought about a utopian future. Through time travel, West sees the 1880s with new eyes: his own time becomes strange to him. In this fictionalized future, all systems of trade, education, and production have been nationalized, and poverty and illness have been almost entirely obliterated. In each

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[12] Ibid., 71-72.

[13] Consider, for example, the white Southern history of erecting monuments to the Confederacy during moments of industrial development and urban growth in the North. The most outspoken group of intellectuals resistant to "Northern" industry and its associations with modernization was headquartered at Vanderbilt University. See Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930; repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1977). Photography historian Alan Trachtenberg also describes this tendency and its effect on photographer Walker Evans's images of the South. See Alan Trachtenberg, "Walker Evans's Fictions of the South," in *Lincoln's Smile and Other Enigmas* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 299-314.

[14] Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000-1887* (1888; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

chapter, the characters retrospectively examine a social system of the 19th century, finding each in need of change. Julian West's host, Dr. Leete, criticizes 19th century industry: "I suppose…that no reflection would have cut the men of your wealth-worshiping century more keenly than the suggestion that they did not know how to make money. Nevertheless, that is just the verdict history has passed on them. Their system of unorganized and antagonistic industries was as absurd economically as it was morally abominable."[15] Toward the end of the book, West hears a sermon in which the minister proclaims a new future and an end to the dark days of the past: "With a tear for the dark past, turn we then to the dazzling future, and, veiling our eyes, press forward."[16] The sermon prompts West's realization of his own displacement. He feels "queer," thinking that his hosts in the year 2000 see him with "mingled pity, curiosity, and aversion…as a representative of an abhorred epoch. … The past was dead, crushed beneath a century's weight, and from the present I was shut out. There was no place for me anywhere. I was neither dead nor properly alive."[17] West finds himself in a liminal space, caught between the future and the past, and out of sync with both; the same feeling of temporal displacement affected several of the Southern artists in this dissertation. Living in a region marked by its longstanding history of exploitative labor practices and the enslavement of millions of people, these artists looked backward to that history while

[15] Ibid., 143.

[16] Ibid., 171.

[17] Ibid., 172-173.

pushing insistently forward, all the while feeling the queerness of their own historical place and the curiosity and even censure of their peers in other regions.

Bellamy's chosen genre (a creative fiction, or romance, rather than a political tract) gave his political ideas a broad audience, including thousands of working class readers who would go on to agitate for labor reforms like those he described in *Looking Backward*. Bellamy's "Nationalist" party became an important political presence in the 1890s and into the 19-teens.[18] As labor historian Franklin Rosemont writes, "Every significant current of labor radicalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries … was strongly affected by Bellamy's dream of the year 2000."[19] The idea that a character could see the present from the vantage of the future was a conceit which Bellamy used to make his activism palatable for a broad audience. The artists in this dissertation thought a lot about the future and how they might shape that future through the work they made, the objects they collected, and the collaborative and community-based projects they undertook (such as providing art classes, establishing reading groups, or giving public lectures). In several cases, they looked to the past as an indicator of what had changed—in their region and in the major aesthetic currents—over the course of the previous 75 years.

Bellamy's texts are an important framing device for my project for two reasons. First, the publication of *Looking Backward* came at a moment of unprecedented national

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[18] Franklin Rosemont, "Bellamy's Radicalism Reclaimed," in *Looking Backward, 1988-1888: Essays on Edward Bellamy*, ed. Daphne Patai (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 147-209.

[19] Ibid., 158.

economic hardship: before the depression of the 1930s, the 1890s were called The Great Depression. Bellamy's utopian novel provided an outline for national labor reform and economic stability in a language accessible to the working classes. The book was republished in the 1930s, and it was received with renewed interest in light of the then new economic crisis. In a 1942 introduction to The Modern Library edition of *Looking Backward*, journalist Heywood Broun writes, "Many of the questions of both mood and technique are even more pertinent in the year 1931 than they were in 1887."[20] Broun continues, calling Bellamy "one of the most authentic prophets of our age."[21] At least one visitor to the White House in 1933 noticed *Looking Backward* in a prominent location in the library there.[22] That same year, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt published a book describing the roots of the economic depression and his plans for a solution. He titled the book *Looking Forward*.[23] Bellamy had cultural currency for the period.

The second reason I turn to Bellamy to frame this dissertation is that his temporal projects resonate with several widely shared concerns that I locate in the years between 1920 and 1940. The years after World War I were marked by optimism, followed quickly

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[20] Heywood Broun, introduction to *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*, by Edward Bellamy (New York: Modern Library, 1942), vii.

[21] Ibid., x.

[22] In a 1958 letter to Sylvia Bowman, lawyer and author Irving Flamm described the book as being in the "most conspicuous part of one of the bookcases in the library" of the White House when he toured it in 1933. See Sylvia Bowman, "The Influence of Edward Bellamy," *Edward Bellamy* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), 127.

[23] Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Looking Forward* (New York: John Day, 1933).

by disillusionment.[24] The Great Depression marched in on the heels of the Jazz Age: boom was immediately followed by bust. Because of this dramatic shift, many writers, historians, and social scientists focused their attention upon the present. Artists and writers were in the forefront of this movement: Regionalists and Modernists painted their visions of the present. The Farm Security Administration's fleet of photographers was given the task of documenting the world around them, capturing images of the floundering economy as it manifested itself in the lives of Americans. Changes in agriculture[25] (which are entangled with issues of race and class) and the development of war industries were focused especially in the South and, as a result, an enormous body of scholarship, imagery, and literature about the region was produced during these years.[26]

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[24] One of the clearest examples of this is found in the experiences of African American soldiers returning from Europe; hopeful that their service would be rewarded by civil rights, many returned home only to face segregation and increasing violence. See Adriane Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[25] See Deborah Fitzgerald, "Accounting for Change: Farmers and the Modernizing State," *The Countryside in the Age of the Modern State: Political Histories of Rural America*, ed. Catherine McNicol Stock and Robert D. Johnston (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 189-212. Fitzgerald writes, "Between 1910 and 1940, the way that American farmers operated their farms changed definitively. In 1910 most American farmers were smallscale, used animals for power, relied on family labor, produced for subsistence as well as regional markets, and were very lightly capitalized. By 1940 farmers had larger farms and more output, used machines such as trucks, tractors, and combines, and produced for international rather than local markets." Ibid., 189.

[26] A small sampling of influential books published about the South in this period includes: W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941); Clarence Cason, *90˚ in the Shade* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935); W. T. Couch, *Culture in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935); Jonathan Daniels, *A Southerner Discovers the South* (New York: MacMillan, 1938); Arthur Raper, *Preface to Peasantry: A Tale of Two Black Belt Counties* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936); and Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1930). It is outside the scope of this dissertation to provide a comprehensive sampling of the fiction or the WPA books (including extensive oral histories and travel guides) published about the South during this period. Some of the works that are relevant for my project include: Erskine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road* (New York: Scribners, 1932); William Faulkner, *The Wild Palms* (New York: Random House, 1939); DuBose Heyward, *Porgy* (New York: Doubleday, 1925) and *Mamba's Daughters* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1929); Julia Peterkin,

The literary Southern Renaissance also took place in the 1920s and 1930s as authors wrote about the changing world around them, many of them self-reflexive about their interest in the past as it informed Southern life in those decades. With an eye trained on the present, artists and writers reimagined the past, described the present, and fantasized about the future to an unprecedented degree and in a way that resonated clearly with Bellamy's writings about time.

Very little scholarship on the South takes into account how historical figures have looked forward. Many scholars of Southern history and culture argue that the past acts as the most substantial foundation for Southerners' constructions of their regional and community identities, and that this makes the region unique from the rest of the country. Writing about memory in the South, Southern historian W. Scott Poole notes, "The South represents what could be called a culture of remembrance, meaning not only that the public face of Southern life borrows heavily from themes from the past (historical monuments, public symbols, historical tourism) but also that the values of Southern life are deeply influenced by the values of commemoration and ancestral meaning."[27] The

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Scarlet Sister Mary (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1928); Writers Program of the Works Progress Administration, *Alabama: A Guide to the Deep South* (New York: R. R. Smith, 1941); and Federal Writers Project, *These Are Our Lives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939). Publications about specific places are too numerous to list and were especially common in Charleston and New Orleans.

[27] W. Scott Poole, "Memory," *Myth, Manners, and Memory: The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* 4, ed. Charles Reagan Wilson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 104. Many other historians have dealt more comprehensively with the importance of memory and nostalgia for the past in the South. See especially William A. Blair, *Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory of the Civil War in the South, 1865-1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); David W. Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory, and the American Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002) and *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Alice Fahs, ed., *The Memory of the Civil War in*

question of whether to look forward or look backward pervades Southern history writing and polemic throughout the 20th century. As historian C. Vann Woodward wrote in *The Burden of Southern History*, "With the crumbling of so many defenses in the present, the [white] South has tended to substitute myths about the past."[28]Such myths are most apparent in the 1930 conservative manifesto *I'll Take My Stand*, which opens with John Crowe Ransom's declaration, "It is out of fashion in these days to look backward rather than forward." [29] The subsequent essays, written by a group of twelve academics headquartered at Vanderbilt University, challenge what their authors saw as the inevitable forward movement championed by Northern industrialists—what Ransom called "the gospel of Progress."[30] Nostalgia, Ransom indicates, is a prevalent feeling in the South, and he defines it as a pain associated with memories of the past: "It occurs to our sorrow when we have decided that it is time for us, marching to some magnificent destiny, to abandon an old home, an old provincial setting, or an old way of living to which we had become habituated."[31]

American Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); John R. Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005); Ben Robertson, *Red Hills and Cotton: An Upcountry Memory* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1960); Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980); C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (1960; repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

[28] Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History*, 12. Insertion mine.

[29] John Crowe Ransom, "Reconstructed but Unregenerate," in *I'll Take My Stand*, ed. Twelve Southerners (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1930), 1.

[30] Ibid., 6.

[31] Ibid., 6.

In his 1941 book *The Mind of the South*, historian W. J. Cash writes about the influence of the past on the region, and he argues that the past is such a powerful force because of the region's agricultural economy (versus an industrial, future-oriented economy):

> The South, one might say, is a tree with many age rings, with its limbs and trunk bent and twisted by all the winds of the years, but with its tap root in the Old South…. The mind of the section, that is, is continuous with the past. And its primary form is determined not nearly so much by industry as by the purely agricultural conditions of that past. So far from being modernized, in many ways it has actually always marched away, as to this day it continues to do, from the present toward the past.[32]

Clarence Cason's 1935 book *90˚ in the Shade*—called "A psychograph of the South" on the book jacket—offers one of the few overt criticisms of the lingering influence of the past on Southern culture written by a Southerner.[33] "In everything one senses the lack of the contemporaneous," he writes, describing the continued acceptance of "agricultural peonage" in the South and the migration of the South's young people to the urban centers outside the region.[34] "Without irreverence to what was beautiful in the culture of the Old South, persons living below the Potomac today cannot afford to make a fetish of the southern plantation before the Civil War," he warns, adding: "It is to be expected that those who persist in maintaining a hooded vision of the past should also fail

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[32] Cash, *Mind of the South*, 1.

[33] Cason was a professor and the head of the Journalism Department at the University of Alabama from 1928 until his death in 1935.

[34] Cason, *90˚ in the Shade*, 40.

to grasp a full picture of what lies before their very eyes."[35] Cason believed that one model for implementing the modern machine culture and its aesthetic into the traditions of the South could be found in contemporary Southern handicrafts. Describing a small-town market, Cason writes:

> These frequently exhibit significant intermixtures between items of the soil and those associated with the machine. Little bundles of fragrant sassafras are tied with narrow strips of checked gingham cloth, eggs are packed for safety in the hulls of cotton seed, mustard greens flecked with drops of water fill the recesses of galvanized-iron washtubs, butter beans of pale green are poured bountifully into brown shoe-cartons from mail-order houses, prickly okra is spread upon cotton sheets lying on the ground…[36]

Cason's elegiac attempt to reconcile old with new demonstrates his gentle effort to critique Southern social policy, especially as it related to the treatment of African Americans. "[White] Southerners frequently have failed to exert their courage in the direction best calculated to gain the ends demanded by considerations of social welfare in the broadest sense. … the South would profit from a nice, quiet Revolution."[37] Terrified that his criticisms of the South would incite retribution and controversy, Cason committed suicide days before the book's publication.

In the past decade, some Southern historians have challenged the disciplinary approach to Southern constructions of the past. In her book *Reconstructing Dixie,* historian Tara McPherson writes that the impulse toward preservation, glorification, and

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[35] Ibid., 51-52.

[36] Ibid., 147.

[37] Ibid., 183, 185.

nostalgia has become not only a habit in the South, but also a stultifying pattern in Southern studies: "Though southern studies is by no means a unified or monolithic category, a tendency prevails within the field to *preserve* the South, that is, to focus on those elements that unify the region ..."[38] The attempt by many Southern scholars to fix the region as a unified whole—one which uniformly looks backward—is contested and challenged in the fields of African American studies and in the emerging literature on Global Souths, among other disciplines. Given that so many Southern artists looked to other places and to diverse Modernist projects to inspire their own ideas, collaborations, and artworks, these critical bodies of scholarship open up avenues that support a new and more complex reevaluation of Southern art.

In his book *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction*, historian Edward L. Ayers points to the need for new historical analyses of the South, especially as the region constructed ideas of the New South or the Old South (two terms in wide parlance after the Civil War).[39] Only one of the test cases in this dissertation is about a group which called itself The New South, but all of my test cases are about artists and writers who confronted the temporal conflict that Ayers describes:

> …the currents of industrial capitalism, the national state, and new cultural styles ran deeply throughout the New South. Those currents created, directly and indirectly, a complex series of backlashes, countercurrents, unexpected outcomes, and archaicisms. As a result, there were things going on simultaneously in the

[38] McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie,* 9. She adds, "…nostalgia also entails a stasis of place, wherein the impossibility of a remembering that illuminates the present proceeds via a fixing of the landscapes and battlefields of the past." Ibid., 104.

[39] Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

> New South that appeared to have little to do with one another but that in fact sprang from a common source: the conflict between the economic, ideological, and cultural legacies of the slave South and those conveyed by the human and material carriers of late nineteenth-century modernity. The personal and public struggles involved in that multifarious conflict were more complicated than any of the categories that historians have devised to explain them.[40]

In the three studies that make up this dissertation, artists and writers engage with these eddies of temporal imagination, looking at once forward, then backward, and responding to the overlapping of a New South with an Old one. Their differences make them a disparate group; on the surface, each of these cases has little in common with the others. What I propose, however, is that writing a new Southern history (or indeed any history) requires the embrace of the contradictory, the multifaceted, and the individual. What these studies share is their existence within a (barely) post-slavery society, still marked by racial apartheid and the regional nationalism of the Civil War, and largely left out of the national movement toward modernization and industrialization. The long history of race in the South draws these studies together; in each, the artists make portraits, exhibitions, and documentary images about Southern ways of marking and historicizing race and its related power hierarchies. Writing about these artists allows me to consider historical absence and to address racial and regional identity as context-specific, fluid constructions, ones which continue to mark the American political landscape.

[40] Edward Ayers, "Narrating the New South," *The Journal of Southern History* 61, no. 3 (August 1995), 559.

ON THE SOUTH AND MODERNISMS

In this dissertation, I write a history of three sets of Southern artists to consider how they thought creatively about their own times and places. I discuss how projects by artists working in diverse—sometimes antiquated—styles also participated in particularly modernist cultural discourses about the past and future. Like the characters in Edward Bellamy's fiction, the artists in this dissertation imagined themselves elsewhere—in other times, in other places, in a different present than the one they inhabited. Crawford's paintings on her drawing room walls are emblematic of a larger cultural phenomenon that I describe here; they are a way of looking backward while opening different paths to the future, and they are a way of making the present strange. Writing in 1952 about the 19-teens, art historian Meyer Schapiro notes, "… The contemporary in art—or living art, as it was called—did not mean simply whatever was done at the time... It meant rather the progressively contemporary, that which modified the acquired past and opened the way to a still newer future."[41] More than 40 years later, art historian and curator Kirk Varnedoe describes the modern as a series of "individual decisions to be an outsider within one's own world, to try new meanings for old forms, and attack old tasks with new means, to accept the strange as useful and to reconsider the familiar as fraught with

[41] This comes from Schapiro's description of the 1913 Armory Show, the first exhibition to introduce the American public to Modern art. Meyer Schapiro, "The Introduction of Modern Art in America: The Armory Show," 1952, republished in *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries, Selected Papers* (New York: George Braziller, 1978), 139. (Emphasis mine)

possibility."[42] Definitions of modernisms remain diverse and fluctuating: "The great variety of this rapidly developing modern art obscured its character and inspired vague or onesided interpretations," Schapiro explains.[43] Wanda Corn's book *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* embraces the multiple ways that American artists adapted and created modern art for themselves.[44] She explores the way modernism functioned as a series of debates, playful dialogues, and transnational ideas tied up in interpretations of a twentieth-century American identity, and she contends that interwar modernists were curious about whether a uniquely American art could also be modern. For the artists in this dissertation, the questions were similar: could Southern art be modern? Could modern art capture something fundamentally Southern? And how could Southern, modern, and American identities overlap in one's artistic practice?

Modernism has been written about as a theoretical framework, a movement, an historical period, an aesthetic, a generation of artists and writers, and/or a philosophical matrix questioning the discourse and social practices of the nineteenth century. However, Corn, Schapiro, and Varnedoe's descriptions of many modernisms have grounded my own understanding of 1930s-specific definitions of the term, ones which have a temporal dimension and explore experiences of outsiderness and local/national identities. To be a Southern artist in the 1930s often entailed being an outsider, feeling queer, and being

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[42] Kirk Varnedoe, *A Fine Disregard: What Makes Modern Art Modern* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 22.

[43] Schapiro, "Modern Art in America," 140.

[44] Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

estranged from one's local community while simultaneously being excluded from national and international art movements. Southern artists in the 1930s suffered from an absence of urban inspiration in their home region and a dearth of arts institutions and training, but many of them traveled to see exhibitions in Europe and in northern American cities, and many found inspiration in rural or small-town life. When they made works which responded to the modern art they saw in galleries and museums elsewhere, they had few (if any) places to show it: these works often combined an aesthetic specific to other places (such as Paris and New York) with subject matter specific to the South. The artists in this dissertation were alternately described as too modern or not modern enough—in both cases, the term was used to exclude them from an exhibition, a fellowship, a publication, or a community on the basis of their work's style. One way that critics and scholars have defined modernism has relied upon explanations and descriptions of a work's formal qualities. This emphasis on form over subject matter can be a way of eliding the social contexts of the works, but it can, alternatively, indicate some of the shared ways in which artists responded to different social, political, and artistic contexts. When an Alabama painter used thick impasto and abstracted figures to paint sharecroppers, she was placing herself in conversation with the people who lived in her local place and with the art being made in other places: both choices (of her form and her subject) indicate her interest in depicting something about her particular artistic, geographic, and temporal contexts. When an artist in New York used the same formal tools to paint a bustling street scene in the city, she was doing the same.

In the 1930s, curators at the young Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York posited a hybrid approach to modernism through its exhibitions. In his 1934 essay "Modern and 'Modern,'" Alfred Barr defends this diversity of curatorial practice as consistent with the diversity of modern art itself:

> Since the [First World] war, art has become an affair of immense and confusing variety, of obscurities and contradictions, of the emergence of new principles and the renascence of old ones. … The truth is that modern art cannot be defined with any degree of finality either in time or in character and any attempt to do so implies a blind faith, insufficient knowledge, or an academic lack of realism.[45]

Through its exhibitions, the museum's curators took accepted European modernists such as Cezanne, Van Gogh, Matisse, Picasso, and Seurat as the subjects of some of their shows while they also curated exhibitions dedicated to African art, design (architectural, interior, and machine-based), folk art, Mexican art (ancient and contemporary), and photography. Many of these curatorial experiments would become foundational parts of a canonical modernist aesthetic, but in the 1930s, they were part of an innovative attempt to understand the contemporary world. This approach is one I also take, allowing for the ways divergent modernisms informed one another, without pressing for one modernist style or canon. The artists in this dissertation understood modernism to be a broad term, one which encompassed many types of work and questions about the world.

Sixty years later, blockbuster exhibitions at MoMA, the Whitney Museum of Art, and the Guggenheim Museum provided new versions of American art in the era of

[45] Alfred Barr Jr., "Modern and 'Modern,'" 1934, republished in *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.* (New York: Abrams, 1986), 83.

Modernism.[46] In many ways, my dissertation is indebted to these recent challenges to the Modernist canon. Such canon-changing and questioning have provided me with the institutional precedent for researching little-known artists who worked outside urban art centers. And yet, the purpose of this dissertation is not simply to add new voices to an art historical trajectory of modernism or to describe their works for future readers who might never see them, nor do I subscribe to the idea that modernism existed as an "undefinable phenomenon."[47] The artists in my study contended with specific ideas of what the term meant in their work and their community projects. I consider what they understood when they spoke or wrote about modernism and the modern, and how their projects participated in modernist communities, even though only tiny segments of those communities have made it into the art historical record. Though some of the projects of the Southern artists I discuss here bear similarities to work being done by artists in other parts of the world, I articulate the reasons these Southern artists felt compelled to use these forms for their own purposes and how those forms subsequently took on new meanings for their makers and viewers. What modernism meant for them, I propose, helps us to understand artistic practice in the 1930s in a more nuanced and expansive way.

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[46] Janet Wolff, *AngloModern: Painting and Modernity in Britain and the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 1-2. Wolff surveys exhibitions including "The American Century: Art and Culture, 1900-1950" (Whitney Museum of American Art, 1999); "Modern Starts: People, Places and Things" (Museum of Modern Art, 1999); and "1900: Art at the Crossroads" (Guggenheim Museum, 2000).

[47] Holland Cotter, "Nation's Legacy, Icon by Icon," *New York Times*, April 23, 1999.

ON COMMUNITY AND ARCHIVES

In 1935, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill published a collection of essays edited by W. T. Couch and titled *Culture in the South*. The subjects of the essays ranged from Southern heritage, agriculture, industry, business, and politics, to handicrafts, coal mining, the middle class, bourbon, and humor. Ula Milner Gregory, a native of New Orleans, wrote the essay on the fine arts. Despite important advances in antebellum architecture, Gregory finds little of value in the arts of the South, and she repeats a litany of reasons for why the region has produced no great art. She writes, "It is tragic that the South has not been able to retain many of the best artists she has produced, but the apathy that has long existed in regard to art matters is responsible for their loss."[48]

Another New Orleanian, Ethel Hutson, had communicated extensively with Couch about the essay; Couch had initially hoped that Hutson would write for the book. Her work as a journalist and artist, as secretary-treasurer for the Southern States Art League (SSAL), and member of the New Orleans Arts & Crafts Club and the Art Association of New Orleans made her a natural choice.[49] Hutson also worked as secretary

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[48] Ula Milner Gregory, "The Fine Arts," *Culture in the South*, ed. W. T. Couch (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 282.

[49] Despite Hutson's importance in New Orleans, very little has been written about her. An unpublished autobiographical essay offers one of the most comprehensive outlines of her involvement in New Orleans and I reproduce it in full here. "Ethel Hutson was born in Baton Rouge, La., April 19, 1872, eldest daughter of Professor Charles Woodward Hutson, of the Louisiana State University, and his wife, Mary Jane Lockett, of Marion, Ala. She was educated in private and public schools, University of Mississippi, A. & M. College of Texas, and studied art under Mrs. J.P. (Cary Lockett) McAuley, Galveston, Texas; in National Academy of Design, Art Students' League, and Pratt Institute, New York, 1898-1900, and Newcomb College, New Orleans, 1904-05. In 1905-06 she designed tiles for the U.S. Encaustic Tile Co.,

to the region's most outspoken and active arts educator, Ellsworth Woodward. In this capacity, Hutson penned an unpublished history of art in the South which is quite different from Gregory's account. In it, she describes the development of the SSAL as a result of widespread efforts to start art associations, museums, clubs, schools, and studios in the South: "The South, with its scattered communities, relatively poor and lacking the stimulus of industry, needed, it appeared, to knit together the separate groups that were working along under such discouraging conditions, and form them into a strong, alert, and aggressive body…"[50] In contrast to Gregory's assessment of Southern artistic production, Hutson suggests that the creation of community is where the strengths of the Southern art world lie. Hutson and Gregory's different opinions are based upon their evaluation of different things: community and objects, respectively. Hutson's proposition that the formation of community was at the heart of the Southern art world has also

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Indianapolis, Ind., and wrote articles and drew illustrations for The Reader Magazine (Bobbs Merrill Co.). She taught art in private classes and in public schools, 1900-1904, and traveled in the interest of art teaching in Texas, 1907-08. The summer of 1910 was spent in European travel. She taught art in Belhaven College, Jackson, Miss., 1911-12. Miss Hutson wrote feature stories and art criticism for the New Orleans Picayune, 1909-1912, and was editor of the Woman's Department, New Orleans Item, 1912-18. She became Research Clerk for the New Orleans Association of Commerce during the World War, and since that date has done political, social service, educational and art publicity, serving as Secretary to the Junior Red Cross, New Orleans Chapter, for two years, and then Executive Secretary of the Tuberculosis and Public Health Association of Louisiana. In 1925 she became Secretary-Treasurer of the Southern States Art league, and serves, too, as Secretary of the Art Committee of the Isaac Delgado Museum of Art. She is also Secretary of the New Orleans Garden Society. She collaborated with her father, C.W. Hutson, LLD., in collecting Lafcadio Hearn's "Fantastics," "Creole Sketches," and "Editorials" (Houghton, Mifflin & Co.). Miss Hutson has been a member since 1904 of the Art Association of New Orleans; was one of the charter members of the Mississippi Art Association, of the Artists' Guild, and of the Arts & Crafts Club of New Orleans. She has exhibited in exhibitions of all these organizations, as well as that of the Southern States Art League. She has worked in various mediums, including oils and water colors, but prefers pastels, and landscapes and flowers are her choice of subjects." "Art in the South: Biographical Notes on the Author," Tulane Archives, SSAL collection, box 134.

[50] SSAL Historical Sketch with Revised Constitution and By-Laws for Year 1929-30. March 1930. SSAL Archives, Tulane University.

informed my approach to these case studies. Each chapter takes one discrete community as its subject and reconstitutes parts of that community through its archival remains.

Ethel Hutson also compiled a list of books and articles about Southern art; the future historian was on her mind as she pulled together the slim resources available on the topic. "Let us not underestimate the value of these collected facts and fancies," she writes. "They constitute the only records from which the future student will select material for the building of the more critical analysis of Southern art history… May I also suggest that as all history is in the process of making, newspaper articles of unusual interest and catalogues of exhibits are of potential value, and should be collected."[51] Archives and personal collections—like those that house Ethel Hutson's meticulously gathered pamphlets, her snipped articles, meeting minutes, and her preserved scrapbooks—document the Southern art world as it existed in the first half of the twentieth century. Personal collections and archival decisions like those made by Hutson have determined many of the directions this dissertation takes and have provided a foundation for this history.

My use of archival collections as the primary site for my research is partly a decision made out of necessity. Most of the art and many of the artists I discuss here have not been written about by historians. Much of the material evidence of the Southern art world of the 1920s, 30s, and 40s has been destroyed, deaccessioned, or put away in attics

[51] Hutson makes a list of periodicals for librarians to include in their collections. These include: *American Magazine of Art* (Washington, D.C.), *Holland's Magazine* (Dallas, Texas), *New Orleans Life*, *The New Orleanian*, *The National Geographic Magazine*, *The Charleston Museum Quarterly*, and *The Southern Clubwoman* (Jacksonville, Florida).

and closets. I use the existing archival collections to complement my own analyses of specific works of art, many of which have not been publicly shown since the 1930s. Ethel Hutson had every reason to be worried; many traces of her artistic community have vanished or moldered away. These archival traces allow us a glimpse of the diversity of that world, which included ladies' arts clubs, academically-trained artists, literary titans, historic preservationists, isolated ceramicists, idealistic arts educators, curators of foundling museums, portrait photographers, mural painters, and self-taught folk artists.

"The making of selves is not simply personal: it is deeply social, conditioned by our cultural and material milieu, the very geographies we inhabit," writes Tara McPherson.[52] Among other things, this dissertation proposes that those geographies change over time, that people move through different social, cultural, and physical geographies, and that art and literature can propose different ways of imagining and describing one's present world by imagining one's place in other worlds. The artists I study in this dissertation traveled to other places, and they were aware that they were working outside the artistic communities that they found in New York, Mexico City, and Chicago. Simultaneously, they were often outcasts from their hometown arts communities. For these reasons especially, they developed their own communities of like-minded artists, writers, and supporters. And, faced with their distance—both geographic and intellectual—from the art worlds they observed elsewhere, the artists in this dissertation sustained their artistic practices through collaboration.

[52] McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie*, 255.

My choice of archival materials suggests a particular way of thinking about history that guides this dissertation's major questions and propositions as well as its written structure. I begin each chapter with an image or text that I discovered during my archival research which seemed to pose a unique problem or question. I rely upon close readings of objects (paintings and photographs, especially) and original texts (letters, journals, and fiction) to support my arguments. I consider some of these pairings to function in a way more like an exhibition than a narrative. That is, by placing objects and texts in relation to one another, I make assertions about the artistic imagination and the intellectual *milieu* of the period I describe, but I also allow some distance to remain between these things. The tension Josephine Crawford's ancestor images create between her family's past (the wallpaper of her home) and her Modernist aesthetic is one that recurs in my three case studies, as the artists in this dissertation responded to various types of modernism to make work in and about the South. The necessarily piecemeal collection of archival materials upon which I build this dissertation reinforces this tension between different narratives of the past and different modes of representing the modern.

SOME NOTES ON PROCESS

This dissertation project officially began for me during a seminar course taught by Ann Reynolds about documentary and melodrama. Looking at photographs made by Farm Security Administration photographers, most of them not from the South, of places I knew from my childhood and adolescence in Georgia, I was confident I could find local artists who had been simultaneously making visual representations of the South during the Great Depression. How might these representations differ from those of the FSA, I wondered, and what part did an artist's Southern or non-Southern identification play in their construction?

Unofficially, this project began many years earlier, while I studied and wrote about Latino art. Reassured by mentors that I could do valuable work on artists of the Chicano Movement, I nonetheless was repeatedly questioned about my stakes in doing such work. How could I identify with a group of artists whose work was about an identity and experience different from my own? What might I have to say about such work? In confronting these questions, I thought it a valuable exercise to turn to a topic to which I could, supposedly, offer some authentic interpretation: the work of artists in the South. The problem of authenticity and identification remains unresolved. I can no more understand the challenges facing Edwin and Elise Harleston or Charles Shannon or Ellsworth Woodward than I could those of artists working within and after the Chicano Movement, any more than any historian can understand the subjects of his or her research. In many cases, the historian is not asked how or why she identifies with her

subjects. The question indicates a suspiciously narrow understanding of identity as solely determined by one's ethnic (in terms of Chicano/Latino art) or regional (in terms of Southern art) identification. What I have learned about the artists I study is that their diverse ways of negotiating identity suggest something valuable for my own understanding of history in the present. Consistently, I find that their constructions of identity are not predictable or one-dimensional. The subjects of this dissertation are women and men who negotiated problematic racial and class-based social systems often in unexpected ways while also building and reaching out to communities which would support and inspire their work. This connects them to many later art movements which have been described in terms of identity—including the Latino artists who inspired my earliest art historical work.

Some of my readers have remarked that in this project I am resistant to large histories, to those which encompass ideas about a whole region, a whole group of people, a whole time period. In this dissertation, I do look to the particulars of individuals and I insist upon the perspective of the individual as an historical subject. This is not out of a fear of large history, of making broad sweeps, but rather it is an exercise in considering specificities as they might inform larger narratives, and of acknowledging heterogeneity as part of historical work. In this dissertation, I ask what role the individual subject plays in the making of history. Many excellent writers have developed histories of the South as a whole, and I am confident that this project does not need to do that work. Other art historians have written about regional artists from areas other than the South. Although there may be similarities in such regional projects, given the dearth of scholarly work on

the artists represented here, I chose to focus my attention entirely upon these Southern artists, with the hope that valuable comparative studies will be written by others.

This dissertation has been written in the midst of great technological change. At the beginning of my graduate school career, seminars were still being taught with slide projectors, and books were available primarily on paper. The intervening years have introduced previously unimaginable quantities of information through the online world, and have created new forms of publishing and of collaboration, based entirely in new technology. To write an archives-based dissertation now is to insist upon the importance of materials, and this I owe to my training in art history, a discipline founded upon close studies of objects. I have also written this dissertation in the midst of a community of emerging scholars who study the construction of communities. We share this interest perhaps partly through a resistance to the impersonality of contemporary technology, and partly as an effect of the emphasis new technologies place upon creating virtual community and social interactions. In many ways, the subjects of this dissertation faced a similar divide between the changing world around them and the conventions of the recent past; similarly, they constructed communities to deal with this strange experience. Writing about communities within a community is an insistence upon interaction, communication, and collaboration as essential to history writing and world changing. As an historian who works with archives and writes about communities, my process informs the kind of writing I do. In some instances in this dissertation (a coda about Elise Harleston's family albums, for example) I allow my process and my content to intersect. This is an intentional choice, and one which I make as part of my belief that the

historian's work and her subjectivity are always contained within the history she writes. Like several of my peers, I believe in making that intersection transparent.[53]

Although some of the roots of this project began in a class discussion about the Farm Security Administration and documentary photography, my decision to begin with Walker Evans and his contribution to *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* was not one I made lightly. Evans is the best-known of the artists in this dissertation, and the literature surrounding his work and the RA/FSA is expansive. Nevertheless, because he looms over the subject of art in the South, I thought it important to bring him into dialogue with the artistic community of the French Quarter—a community he had ties to during his short visits to New Orleans, but one which never really welcomed him. To change the narrative about Evans's photographs as objective documents of the South requires thinking about what Evans's stakes were in photographing the region. I study his work in relationship to book projects made in New Orleans during the 1920s and 1930s because book-making was such a central component of Works Progress Administration artistic production, and because Evans's book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* made with James Agee, is perhaps the best known 20th century book about the South. In my first chapter, then, I consider other ways of making books about a place, and how such books indicate their makers' places within specific communities and in relation to (or in contradiction to) the documentary genre.

[53] My colleagues Andy Campbell, Tara Kohn, and Chelsea Weathers have been invaluable guides in my discovery of my own place in the writing of this history.

My selection of the subjects of the other chapters was based both upon the availability of archival materials and upon my own intuition that each would yield substantial and complicated studies about race-making in the South. Why would white artists have such a strong stake in showing the work of a self-taught black artist in segregated Montgomery? And why might a black artist living in Charleston during the Harlem Renaissance resist the new African-inspired aesthetic emerging from New York in the 1920s? My second and third chapters are tied to larger histories of modernisms, regional identity, and race. Among other things, they indicate the small role documentary photographs played in local representations of the region, suggesting instead that these artists were making locally-specific work, based upon national and international discourses.

What are the stakes of this dissertation? I believe that by studying figures historically perceived as outsiders from the social norm, we understand more fully how that norm conceives of itself and what it leaves behind. Why write about the South? I believe that the South remains a unique signifier of difference, even as the conservative politics that have contributed to the region's poverty, illiteracy, bigotry, and religious extremism remain a part of the national political climate. The artists in the three studies of this dissertation were caught in a moment of optimism about progressive change to their beloved region, even as they faced the disheartening conditions of life in the South during the era of the Great Depression. Given our current national political and economic climate, their examples seem to me to be pertinent.

LOOKING FORWARD TOGETHER

In my first chapter, I begin by writing about the role documentary photography has played in representations of the South, especially through images made by Walker Evans for the Resettlement Administration and for his book project with James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941). In the 1930s, documentary became an accepted mode of presenting ideas and information about the contemporary world, and it fundamentally affected the ways in which viewers "read" images of specific places and interpreted them as true. I suggest that the campaign by MoMA to canonize photography—and especially Walker Evans's photography—as a modern art form erased the photographer's personal connections to New Orleans while simultaneously determining which kinds of documentary would become historically important. I write about Evans's work in relation to other descriptive, non-documentary projects being made in New Orleans during the 1920s and 1930s. These include two guidebooks to the city authored by Lyle Saxon and texts by William Faulkner, William Spratling, and William Woodward that describe the French Quarter. In all of these projects, the artists and writers I study deal with temporality and community in the city's French Quarter neighborhood: they represent the Quarter's present state through their perceptions of its past and in relation to how they imagine its future would unfold. In New Orleans, the Quarter became a central location for the kinds of temporal questions and propositions that were playing out across the region: would Southerners bury their culture in fantasies

about the past, or would they build something new, looking toward the future? And, what would something new look like?

I conclude the chapter by writing about the Southern States Art League (SSAL) archive compiled by New Orleans arts educator Ellsworth Woodward and his longtime secretary, Ethel Hutson. Woodward and Hutson's collection of materials represents their two-decade long project to create a regional artistic community in the South through an organization which hosted annual conferences and exhibitions. The archive they built demonstrates their attempts to construct a community and to preserve traces of that community for artists and historians in the future. It offers a different approach to New Orleans than my previous examples: it takes the artistic communities of New Orleans as a foundation for the development of a shared regional identity, and it uses the city of New Orleans (and the experience of walking through it) to describe the creation of that identity.

In his book *The Writing of History*, Michel de Certeau notes, "history is played along the margins which join a society with its past and with the very act of separating itself from that past."[54]The margins de Certeau describes are characterized by the tension between the events of the past and the methods the historian uses to approach them: de Certeau uses the phrase "vibration of limits" to further describe this history-writing process. Each of the descriptive projects I discuss in this chapter represent a city, a neighborhood, or a community within specific temporal and geographic limits. In this chapter, I place iconic photodocumentary projects alongside quirky local books with

[54] Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 37.

insider references and a regional organization which tried to define Southern identity and spark Southern community. I present a case for the relationships that exist among these things—the vibrations they create when placed next to each other—because these relationships destabilize some of the most well-known images of the South.

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In my second chapter, I write about the work of Elise and Edwin Harleston, two artists who lived in Charleston, South Carolina and ran a portrait studio there in the 1920s. I anchor this chapter with a discussion of two portraits of the same person: a photograph taken by Elise and a painted portrait created by Edwin, both of Sue Bailey. I build out from these two portraits, using them as starting points for a study of the Harlestons' relationships to specific educational and political philosophies, to local and distant artistic communities, and to debates about creating images of black individuals in the 1920s. I consider the ways the portraits emblematize the Harlestons' reactions to other communities of artists—specifically to the local community of the Charleston Renaissance, and to the community centered in New York that was developing an African- and Modernist-inflected movement in the 1920s. Because their work and their educations link up with those of some of the most important American intellectuals, painters, writers, and photographers of the early 20th century—including W. E. B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, Alain Locke, Aaron Douglas, Winold Reiss, C. M. Battey, Julia Peterkin, and DuBose Heyward—the Harlestons demonstrate the fluidity with which many artists moved in and out of the historical frameworks used to describe

the milieu surrounding those figures: the New Negro, the Talented Tenth, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Charleston Renaissance.

Many of his contemporaries described Edwin's work as out of step with the new arts of his time. There are no historical accounts of Elise's work. Because of their respective outsiderness and absence from historical writing, I developed this chapter from a close reading of the Harleston family archives and careful study of their existing photographs and paintings. Taken together, these archival traces indicate another axis along which to organize information about the construction of artistic community during this time period. The Harleston archives record some of the ways that insider/outsider positions were created by the movement which would become codified as the Harlem Renaissance. They also illuminate the ways Charleston's local art world used art to define the terms of insider/outsider and Southerner. Ultimately, the Harleston archives indicate the fraught relationships between these identities and a contemporaneous discourse regarding race and modernism.

Writing about the "intimate psychological exchange" between a sitter and a portrait artist, art historian Richard Brilliant cites Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past:* "We are not a materially constituted whole, identical for everyone, which each of us can examine like a list of specifications or a testament; our social personality is a creation of other people's thought."[55] The citation gets at the ways in which the mode of portraiture provokes critical debate about the splits among the significance of the sitter, the depiction of her, the artist, and the viewer who may or may not understand the

[55] Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books Limited, 1991), 32.

relationships among sitter, image, and artist. Photographic portraiture exacerbates these complications because the camera is so often associated with indexical accuracy (although, as I discuss in my first chapter, even the most seemingly objective documentary photographs are subjective constructions). If, as Proust writes, a modern subject's identity is inherently unstable and changeable, the decisions made by the portrait artist (whether painter or photographer) indicate a way of seeing the subject which relates to the artist's own identity. To further complicate matters, the artist's perception of the sitter is temporally and socially bounded. To make portraits of African American subjects in the 19-teens and 1920s was to represent one's relationship to a whole host of contemporary and historical forms of black representation, as they connected to the emerging educational and political theories of the long Civil Rights Movement, and as they countered extensive bodies of stereotypical and phenotypical representations of black bodies. In this chapter, I historicize ways that Edwin and Elise Harleston may have perceived their subjects and situated their respective portrait practices within the specific time (the 1920s) and places (Charleston, but also New York and Chicago) in which they worked.

I conclude the chapter by proposing that both Harlestons also broke from the conventions of portraiture, especially as their careers matured. In a lecture series titled "Building a Picture," Edwin proposed an alternative future art history. And, in her family photograph albums, Elise used the snapshot to make different kinds of images, which have meaning for their viewers—mostly her family—through their association with other family images and stories.

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In my third chapter, I write about a series of exhibitions held at The New South gallery and art school in Montgomery, Alabama between 1939 and 1940. I begin this chapter with a close reading of a photograph of the group, and I connect that photograph to group members' interest in local African American culture. The central concern of the white New South members, I argue, was indigenous life as they imagined it through their interactions with black Alabamans. Many of the paintings New South members created depict African American figures, represented in visual styles influenced by Mexican Muralism and American Regionalism. I consider the ways the group imagined race to function in Montgomery, through their shared interest in Mexican art. I then study how their images were received and racialized differently by critics in New York, to demonstrate the fluidity of a racial imagination as it existed between places during the late 1930s.

Members of the New South traveled to New York City and Mexico, where they discovered and adopted ideas about indigeneity and visual practice. Their art and exhibitions reflect many of the concerns associated with American Regionalism and Modernism, refracted through the lens of supposedly authentic indigenous expression as they understood it via Mexican contemporary art and craft or, alternatively, as they understood it through exhibitions they saw at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. Their interactions with friends and with other artists elucidate how they tried to apply their observations from seeing objects and exhibitions elsewhere to Montgomery, to create a new cultural identity within that city. I consider the inherent

instability of such processes of adaptation and interpretation over time to show how the group negotiated and renegotiated its ideas about art, place, and power. The regional and artistic identities of the New South artists reflect the dynamic ways that these artists contested (and misunderstood) relationships of power at home and while traveling.

By placing objects next to each other, an exhibition's curator encourages viewers to see resonances and imagine affinities among the works. How one moves between the different objects in an exhibition, connects them together, and ultimately understands them, is moderated by the curator's arrangement, but it is also a creative process, fostered by the spaces that exist between the works. In a dissertation project in which archival evidence is scant and scholarship is almost nonexistent, making these spaces productive requires imaginative reconstruction. In this chapter, I look at how such reconstruction—always part of the process of writing histories—has historically favored certain narratives over others.

CHAPTER ONE

A Walker Evans Way of Seeing:

Descriptions of New Orleans, 1926-1941

> Once our senses are attuned to Evans' way of seeing,
> it takes some effort to perceive the world in other ways.[56]
> - JOHN T. HILL, "AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHS: LEGACY OF SEEING"

In his essay for Walker Evans's 1938 exhibition *American Photographs* at MoMA, curator Lincoln Kirstein dismisses the 1930s "vogue" of the candid-camera and its shocking "visions of clipped disaster," and describes Evans, in contrast, as a "straight" photographer: "The most characteristic single feature of Evans' work is its purity, or even its Puritanism. It is 'straight' photography not only in technique but in the rigorous directness of its way of looking. … [Evans] can be considered a kind of *disembodied* burrowing eye, a conspirator against time and its hammers."[57] This foundational story about Evans's work—that he was drawn foremost to formal elements and the construction of the image—effectively removes Evans's personal, embodied connections to his subjects from his most iconic images to describe a pure Evansian style. But Evans's work throughout the 1930s, particularly his work in the South, was anything but disembodied. New Orleans figured prominently in Evans's personal life, and the

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[56] John T. Hill, "American Photographs: Legacy of Seeing," in *Walker Evans: American Photographs* (1938; repr., New York: Errata Editions, 2011), n.p.

[57] Lincoln Kirstein, "Photographs of America: Walker Evans," in *Walker Evans: American Photographs* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), 196. Emphasis mine. For an excellent study of Lincoln Kirstein's importance in the cultural worlds of New York, see Martin Duberman, *The Worlds of Lincoln Kirstein* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

photographs he made during (and immediately after) his time there in 1935 and 1936—including his *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* photographs and his much less well-known photographs of the 1935 *African Negro Art* exhibition at MoMA—mark the beginning of a stylistic trajectory he continued throughout much of his later work. Kirstein's emphasis upon the purity of Evans's work also situates Evans as a singular figure, rather than a participant in a broader historical discourse. Evans was, of course, involved in many of the most significant art organizations of the 1930s, maintaining close friendships with the curatorial staff at the Museum of Modern Art and working for the Resettlement Administration. Before he traveled to Alabama with James Agee to make *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, he was also a participant (if a relatively insignificant one) in the artistic community of New Orleans. Consequently, Evans's photographs taken circa 1935 may be considered within that context too—not separately from his work in New York and Alabama, but interwoven with it. By considering Evans's photographs in relation to other kinds of work being made in New Orleans, especially books and archives which bear a descriptive relationship to the city, we see a different Evans and, maybe more importantly, we see some of the ways his photography intersected with the discourse of that particular time and place.

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In 1941, Walker Evans and James Agee published *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, the most famous account of the South made in the 20th century.[58] The book, which

[58] In the 19th century, the best known account of the South was Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (New York: Houghton Mifflin,

describes the daily lives of three sharecropping families in rural Alabama through more than 400 pages of text and 31 photographs, was not an immediate success in critical or financial terms. Evans and Agee had begun the project in 1936, when they were commissioned by *Fortune* magazine to develop an article about white sharecroppers, and it quickly became too big of a project for the magazine. Realizing the project was no longer an article, Evans and Agee redeveloped it as a photodocumentary book, a popular genre in the 1930s for combining text and image.[59] But in the intervening five years between Evans and Agee's visit to Alabama and the publication of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, the project lost its immediacy. The book was published as the American press was turning its attention to the war in Europe and, simultaneously, as the wartime boom industry was offering new economic opportunities for rural Southerners. By 1941, the plight of sharecroppers was no longer a timely subject. The book sold approximately

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1941). Since its initial publication and its republication in 1960, the book has been the subject of countless books, dissertations, conference panels, and articles in the fields of American Studies, Art History, and Comparative Literature. Some of the most substantive texts about *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and its relationship to the term "documentary" include: Jeff Allred, *American Modernism and Depression Documentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Dale Maharidge, *And Their Children After Them: The Legacy of* Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*: James Agee, Walker Evans, and the Rise and Fall of Cotton in the South* (New York: Pantheon, 1989); Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary* (New York: Verso, 1994); Martha Rosler, "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (on documentary photography)," in *Martha Rosler: Three Works* (Nova Scotia: Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981); Maren Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America, 1890-1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); John Stomberg, "A Genealogy of Orthodox Documentary," in *Beautiful Suffering*, eds. Mark Reinhardt, Holly Edwards, and Erina Duganne (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 37-56; William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); and Alan Trachtenberg, *Lincoln's Smile and Other Enigmas* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007).

[59] Several of these books were published about the South, including: Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White, *You Have Seen Their Faces* (New York: Modern Age Books, 1937); Herman Clarence Nixon, *Forty Acres and Steel Mules* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938); Arthur Raper and Ira Reid, *Sharecroppers All* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941); and Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices* (New York: Viking Press, 1941).

600 copies in its first year of publication, and it received tepid reviews. In her biography of Evans, Belinda Rathbone writes that this was a mark, to Agee, of the book's artistic significance: "To Agee, this was all as it should be. The book's commercial failure meant that he had succeeded in protecting his subjects from journalistic exploitation and himself from the sins of success."[60] The vision of the South that Agee and Evans had created would be mostly forgotten until its republication in 1960, when it was taken up by a new readership with a renewed interest in the problems of the South: the book's popularity and historical importance were determined by this generation of readers.

In the 1930s, while Evans and Agee were researching and making their book, national interest in the South was cultivated by many different kinds of documentary practice, including photography, oral history, and living newspaper, all art forms which took research, contemporary life, and the writing of history as their defining characteristics.[61] Documentary photographs were an especially prevalent visual form throughout the 1930s, partly due to the production of the small format Leica camera in the 1920s and the development of faster speeds of film and camera lenses, all of which allowed photographers to shoot quickly and to unobtrusively capture their subjects in

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[60] Belinda Rathbone, *Walker Evans: A Biography* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 187.

[61] Documentary was a term that had a multiplicity of meanings in the 1930s. For more about documentary and histories of its usage, see especially: Beaumont Newhall, "Documentary Approach to Photography." *Parnassus* 10, no. 3 (March 1938), 2-6; Karin Becker Ohrn, *Dorothea Lange and the Documentary Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980); Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straux and Giroux, 1973); Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life*; Stomberg, "A Genealogy of Orthodox Documentary"; Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*; John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); and John Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

many different kinds of light. This spontaneity was associated with truthfulness and a journalistic approach, and it was perfect for the documentary style because it indicated that the photographer had caught the scene before her by surprise and that her subjects were unposed.

Of the documentary photographs made in the 1930s, most well known were the photographs commissioned by the Resettlement Administration (RA, 1935-1937) later reorganized as the Farm Security Administration (FSA, 1937-1942) and subsequently as the Office of War Information (OWI, 1942-1944).[62] Under the direction of Roy E. Styker for most of those years, the government-sponsored institution hired photographers to travel across the country and take photographs of individuals, communities, architectural structures, and landscapes that bore visible traces of the effects of the Depression. These images were then published widely in newspapers, magazines, and photodocumentary books. The government retained the prints and many of the negatives, ensuring that they

[62] The organization most commonly called the FSA was begun by Rexford Guy Tugwell, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture in the Frankin Delano Roosevelt administration. Tugwell appointed Roy Stryker, an economist at Columbia University, to head the Photography Section at the Resettlement Administration in 1935, and the section was renamed the Farm Security Administration shortly thereafter. Stryker hired Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Carl Mydans, Arthur Rothstein, and Ben Shahn in 1935 and added John Collier, Jr., Jack Delano, Russell Lee, Gordon Parks, Marion Post Wolcott, and John Vachon the following year. This fleet of photographers traveled across the country (usually individually) to photograph FSA-sponsored events and farming practices. Between 1935 and 1942, the FSA photographers created a body of more than 270,000 black-and-white and color photographs of the United States. Their photographs were subsequently disseminated in newspapers, magazines, and books. For more information about the work of the RA/FSA/OWI, see Pete Daniel, Merry Foresta, Maren Stange, and Sally Stein, *Official Images: New Deal Photography* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987); Jack Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972); and Roy Stryker and Nancy Wood, *In This Proud Land* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1973). The Library of Congress maintains a thorough online archive of the FSA photographs, with related bibliographic material and short essays about the photographers, among other resources, at: http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fahome.html.

would be available in an archival collection for future researchers.[63] Their ubiquity in the 1930s and their subsequent accessibility at the Library of Congress has solidified the role of the FSA photographs as the most well-known and widely published images of American life during the Depression, then and now.[64]

Many documentary photographs made in the 1930s traded in an idea of presentness: if the viewer felt like she was watching a scene unfold before her, she might also feel connected to the individuals portrayed in the image.[65] A feeling of closeness despite the actual geographic, economic, and experiential distances between a viewer and the subject(s) of a photograph was meant to encourage American viewers to believe that they understood something fundamental about the experiences of other Americans. What they understood and what they saw, however, were not necessarily analogous. What they

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[63] When the Library of Congress acquired the FSA photograph collection (and its files and negatives) in 1944, the way in which these photographs could be seen changed fundamentally. The archival viewing of the images—furthered by the establishment of an online searchable database of most of the images—allows contemporary viewers to sort and organize the images by subject, photographer, or location. One effect of this archival organization of the photographs is that dozens of books have been published which reproduce FSA photographs of one place. Among many others, these include: Michael L. Carlebach, *Farm Security Administration Photographs of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993); Herbert K. Russell, *A Southern Illinois Album: Farm Security Administration Photographs, 1936-1943* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990); and Carolyn Kinder Carr, *Ohio: A Photographic Portrait, 1935-1941: Farm Security Administration Photographs* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1980). To date, no survey of FSA photographs of New Orleans has been produced.

[64] Stryker and his photographers were especially interested in the South, where many of the FSA's agricultural initiatives were based (and later, where many of the OWI's wartime initiatives were focused). When Evans made his photographs for *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* he was on leave from his position as staff photographer for the RA. Many of his *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* photographs appear in subsequent FSA publications, a stipulation of his contract with the RA.

[65] Here I am influenced by art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau, who writes that one effect of the medium of photography is a "structural congruence of point of view (the eye of the photographer, the eye of the camera, and the spectator's eye) [which] confers on the photograph a quality of pure, but delusory, presentness." Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 180.

saw were two-dimensional depictions of subjects in space, printed on paper, often composed using familiar perspectival systems indicating depth of field. What viewers drew from many RA/FSA/OWI photographs included politically charged and historically specific ideas about rural life, poverty, race, and class; these ideas were produced by the overlapping contexts in which the images were created and seen and by the taxonomies through which they were organized.

Writing in 1938, photography historian Beaumont Newhall defines documentary photography "as a creation based upon research, capable of eliciting emotion, and intended to have a 'sociological purpose.'[66] For Newhall, the documentary photograph was only successful through its relationship to a viewer: "The photograph is not valid as a document until it is placed in relationship to the beholder's experience."[67] Newhall was especially interested in the work being done by the FSA photographers, by photo magazines such as *Life* and *Look*, and by photodocumentary books. In each of these formats, Newhall writes, presentation of the photograph (and each photograph's relationship to surrounding text, to related images, and to the page) combined with the photograph itself to create a specific experience for a viewer/reader. For Newhall, this specific experience was what confirmed the image, book, or text's status as documentary.

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[66] Beaumont Newhall, "Documentary Approach to Photography," *Parnassus* 10, no. 3 (March 1938), 5.

[67] Ibid., 6.

Newhall writes, "before a photograph can be accepted as a document, it must itself be documented—placed in time and space."[68] When viewers in the 1930s and 1940s saw the FSA photographs, they did so primarily through publications. And, when the photographs were published, they were almost always accompanied by texts and/or captions. In many photodocumentary books, writers use the presumed objectivity of the photographs as a foundation for texts which emotively describe the effects of the Depression upon the photographs' subjects. For example, in 1937, Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White published *You Have Seen Their Faces*, a photodocumentary book about Southern poverty (Figure 4). The book was an immediate best-seller, and it tapped into popular interest in the region's failing agricultural and economic systems. In their book, Caldwell and Bourke-White created "legends" which described the hopelessness of their individual subjects. Under a photograph of a tenant farmer whose face is weather-beaten and wrinkled, for example, the authors write: "A man learns not to expect much after he's farmed cotton most of his life" (Figure 5). Although a caveat in the book's front-matter identified the legends as creations of the authors, the convention of captions in journalism and in many photodocumentary books led a handful of critics to charge that Bourke-White and Caldwell were misleading their readers, encouraging them to believe the short statements had been made by the men and women in the photographs.

James Agee was one of those critics; he considered the authors to have crossed a line between documenting and interpreting their subject matter—and interpreting it in the most abject manner possible. In the appendix to *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* Agee

[68] Ibid.

bitterly describes Bourke-White's financial success, casting her as a callous, wealthy socialite who loved to wear designer clothing and go to the movies in her free time. Agee pits this luxurious lifestyle against Bourke-White's photographs, as if to prove her exploitation of her subjects. He uses this criticism of her life to question the sincerity and truthfulness of her documentary work. To do this, he quotes Bourke-White on photography: "I believe, too, that photographs are a true interpretation. One photograph might lie, but a group of pictures can't… With a camera, the shutter opens and it closes and the only rays that come in to be registered come directly from the object in front of you."[69] Writing in the 1970s, historian William Stott describes a secondary form of documentary made in the 1930s—one which is commonly considered representative of how documentary works—which he calls "historical document." He writes, "This 'documentary' has been defined as 'presenting facts objectively and without editorializing and inserting fictional matter, as in a book, newspaper account or film.'"[70] Agee and (30 years later) Stott's criticism of Caldwell and Bourke-White's book hinges on this assertion of documentary objectivity. Agee and Stott believed *You Have Seen Their Faces* should function as an historical document (and Agee's inclusion of the Bourke-White quotation was intended to support this belief). Like Agee, Stott writes in deeply offended tones to argue that Bourke-White and Caldwell intentionally duped their readers: "what a reader feels behind the photographs and captions in *You Have Seen*

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[69] Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 401.

[70] Stott, *Documentary Expression*, 5-6.

Their Faces is an imagination twisting the facts to squeeze the easiest and most maudlin emotions from them; a spirit that regards its craft, its effect, rather than its subject."[71] Both Stott and Agee's criticism of *You Have Seen Their Faces* focused on how Caldwell and Bourke-White conceived of the genre of documentary—specifically, the way in which they created subjective and imaginative legends within the photodocumentary genre. Caldwell and Bourke-White's legends indicate that the author and photographer understood documentary to be subjective and malleable, that quotations could be created and subjects could be chosen that would indicate one particular proposition about the book's subject. Most readers and critics in the 1930s responded enthusiastically to *You Have Seen Their Faces*, and it seems that most readers understood the legends to be interpretive.[72] Many reviewers commended the photographs for conveying information about their subjects so clearly. Newhall referred to the book as one of "the most penetrating photo-documents" yet made in 1938.[73] Although Agee and Stott's point of view has subsequently informed most of the writing about these books, a reader in 1941

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[71] Ibid., 223.

[72] John Stomberg's essay "A Genealogy of Orthodox Documentary" surveys the reception of *You Have Seen Their Faces.* Stomberg's essay summarizes several contemporary reviews of the book, including: Malcom Cowley, "Books in Review: Fall Catalogue," *The New Republic* 93 (November 24, 1937), 78; Donald Davidson, "Erskine Caldwell's Picture Book," *The Southern Review* 4 (1938-1939), 15-25; Arthur Ellis, "Photographer Shares Honors with Writer in New Book," *The Washington Post* (November 14, 1937), 19; Margaret Marshall, "You Have Seen Their Faces," *The Nation* 145 (December 4, 1937), 622; W. P. Robinson, "You Have Seen Their Faces," *The Journal of Negro Eduction* 7 (October 1938), 562; and Ralph Thompson, "Books of the Times," *The New York Times* (November 10, 1937), 29. For another account of the book's reception, see Robert E. Snyder, "Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White: You Have Seen Their Faces," *Prospects* II (1987), 397-406.

[73] Newhall, "Documentary Approach," 5.

would never have imagined that Evans and Agee's book would eventually enjoy much more popular prominence and scholarly attention than *You Have Seen Their Faces*.

While making *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Evans and Agee drew from some of the conventions of the photodocumentary book genre, but they also worked against those conventions. Evans's series of photographs were printed at the very front of the book, with no caption information. Both Evans and Agee were determined that the photographs would stand alone, that they would not illustrate Agee's words. Agee's long essay was painfully self-conscious of its relationship to a documentary function. In his preface, Agee reflects upon the problems of documentary, calling its creation "curious, obscene, terrifying, and unfathomably mysterious."[74] Most of the text consists of descriptions: Agee extensively describes the objects and settings of rural Southern life. Throughout the book he struggles to maintain awareness of his place as the person creating a documentary project: "As for me, I can tell you of him [the subject] only what I saw, only so accurately as in my terms I know how."[75] He defines the parameters of the project as he and Evans imagined it:

> The nominal subject is North American cotton tenantry as examined in the daily living of three representative white tenant families. Actually, the effort is to recognize the stature of a portion of unimagined existence, and to contrive techniques proper to its recording, communication, analysis, and defense. … This is a *book* only by necessity. More seriously, it is an effort in human actuality, in which the reader is no less centrally involved than the authors and those of whom they tell.[76]

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[74] Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 6.

[75] Ibid., 9.

[76] Ibid., x-xi.

By scrutinizing every observation and affective response he had to the experience of living with the sharecropper families, Agee attempted to create an objective report on his experience, and he grappled with the realization that complete objectivity was impossible. Evans and Agee, however, believed their struggle to be objective was morally superior to the documentary approach taken by Bourke-White and Caldwell. Further, this moral superiority was accompanied by what they believed to be aesthetically superior content, a kind of high art documentary form.

They were not alone in considering *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* high art documentary. Art historian John Stomberg compares the publication and reception histories of *You Have Seen Their Faces* and *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, describing the ways in which Evans's supporters at the Museum of Modern Art carefully pitted his photographs and method against those of Bourke-White, making this high/low distinction.[77] As Stomberg demonstrates, the aesthetic of Evans's 1930s photographs in the South gained institutional acceptance through a campaign (based at MoMA) to make them seem disengaged from the lives of his subjects. By describing an aesthetic of disengagement in Evans's work, Lincoln Kirstein and Thomas Mabry argued for the importance of his photographs within the context of contemporary art. Mabry, Stomberg writes, "introduced a theme, not too subtly neoclassical in its argument, which would

[77] Stomberg writes, "In 1938 a small group of men determined to change the course of contemporary photography and succeeded. That group included Walker Evans, Lincoln Kirstein, James Agee, and Thomas Mabry. …Though this was at heart an aesthetic dispute, Evans and his friends often presented their aesthetic preferences as ethical principles, arguing that some formal approaches to photography were inherently morally superior." Stomberg, 37.

accompany Evans' work for decades—order implied morality, austerity denoted truth, and the combination represented virtue."[78] The definition of Evans's documentary style relied upon the idea of a modernist eye, disembodied and impersonal. It implied that Evans had the ability to see and represent the world as it really was. But Evans's images taken in the South were also marked by a momentous personal event which would significantly influence his work (and which has been frequently ignored in histories and exhibitions of his work): in 1935, during his first visit to New Orleans, Walker Evans fell in love.

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In January 1935, a year before he made his *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* photographs, Evans traveled to the South to photograph examples of Greek Revival architecture for a book project funded by Gifford Cochran, a friend of Lincoln Kirstein's. The book was to build from Evans's first solo exhibition of architectural photographs at the Museum of Modern Art, held in 1933.[79] Traveling by chauffeured car, Evans and Cochran made a leisurely trip through the South before arriving in New Orleans in February. Upon their arrival, Cochran rented them a furnished apartment in the French Quarter. He then left abruptly, taking a train back to New York. Conveniently for Evans, he left the photographer with a car, an apartment, and a cook/housekeeper. Left alone in an unfamiliar city, Evans reached out to Paul Ninas, director of the New Orleans Arts &

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[78] Ibid., 48.

[79] Evans's first solo show at MoMA was titled *Walker Evans: Photographs of 19th Century Houses,* and it was held from November 16 to December 8, 1933.

Crafts Club. Through Paul, Evans met Jane Smith Ninas. Jane had just graduated from Newcomb College where she studied art, and she was married to Paul. Evans invited her join him as he worked on his book project, and over the course of several weeks they traveled together to various area plantations. She sketched examples of rural vernacular architecture while Evans photographed Southern neoclassical structures, working with a small Leica and a bulkier view camera.[80] On one such outing, Evans photographed Belle Grove Plantation in White Castle, Louisiana. In *Louisiana Plantation House*, Evans composed his picture at an angle from the front porch of the house, emphasizing the grandeur of the large columns which stretch around the building (Figure 6). In front of the building lies a large dead tree. Uprooted and fallen to the ground, the tree partially blocks the view of the porch. Another photograph from that trip, an interior photograph Evans called *Breakfast Room*, shows the doorway into a small antechamber, seen from the adjoining larger room (Figure 7). The entrance is framed by two Corinthian columns and the Corinthian pattern tops the engaged columns which repeat around the room. The rooms are lit by natural light from windows located to the left of the frame, and shuttered windows are centered in the entranceway to the smaller room. Curator Jeff Rosenheim writes:

> Behind the massive Corinthian columns…[Evans] made a haunting photograph about absence. The room is bereft of life—yet filled with capitals and columns

[80] Although most of Jane Ninas's work from this period was destroyed by the artist in the 1970s, a reproduction of her painting *Negro Cemetery* can be found in the MoMA exhibition catalog for the *New Horizons in American Art* exhibition of 1936. Six works are included in black and white in the exhibition catalog *Walker Evans and Jane Ninas in New Orleans, 1935-1936* published by the Historic New Orleans Collection in 1991.

> made from cypress trees that slaves had harvested on the plantation. Wet rot stains the dentils. … In a single image Evans summed up his understanding of the history of classical architecture in the antebellum South: grand of design and crafted by true artisans, the house was nevertheless built upon an untenable social structure.[81]

Evans's newly found romance with the South and his fascination with the region's decaying antebellum architecture coincided with his romantic relationship with Jane: during the same outing, Evans also made several photographs of Ninas and a friend of hers on the house's balcony. In these images, she beams down at him surrounded by columns and their shadows and framed by the house (Figure 8).[82]

In March, Evans returned to New York, but he was determined to see Ninas again. He was also eager to make more photographs in the city proper; he felt especially as if he had missed important opportunities to photograph the French Quarter and its architecture.[83] Upon his return to New York, the architecture book fell through over arguments about funding.[84] However, Evans soon received another MoMA-related commission. Thomas Mabry, executive director at MoMA, hired Evans to photograph each of the individual works in an exhibition of African sculpture held at the museum that spring. Titled *African Negro Art,* the exhibition included 603 objects selected from

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[81] Jeff Rosenheim, "The Cruel Radiance of What Is: Walker Evans and the South," *Walker Evans*, ed. Maria Morris Hambourg (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 65.

[82] Several authors have noted the connection between his architectural photographs from this short trip to Louisiana and his relationship with Ninas. Evans's biographer, Belinda Rathbone, writes "At Belle Grove, Walker's usual emotional reserve was tempered by a new spirit, a romance with the South's decline inspired by the presence of his thoughtful companion." Rathbone, *Walker Evans: A Biography*, 98.

[83] Rathbone, 99.

[84] Rathbone, 99.

more than fifty private collections and seventeen museums by curators Alfred Barr and James Johnson Sweeney.[85] The museum promoted the exhibition as the first to present the objects as works of art rather than as ethnographic or anthropological specimens, and the installation was meant to reinforce this assertion of the objects' status as fine art.[86] Barr and Sweeney installed the sculptures in white-walled rooms, on pedestals, and with minimal wall text (Figure 9). Unlike ethnographic displays, the works were not arranged by provenance or function. Instead, they were arranged by form and size; the decision called attention to the works' sculptural aesthetic and design. In a press release announcing the exhibition, Sweeney writes:

> The art of the primitive negro in its mastery of aesthetic forms, sensitiveness to materials, freedom from naturalistic imitation and boldness of imagination parallels many of the ideals of modern art. … It is the vitality of the forms of Negro art that should speak to us, the simplification without impoverishment, the unerring emphasis on the essential, the consistent, three-dimensional organization of structural planes in architectonic sequences, the uncompromising truth to material with a seemingly intuitive adaptation of it, and the tension achieved between the idea or emotion to be expressed through representation and the abstract principles of sculpture. The art of negro Africa is a sculptor's art. As a sculptural tradition in the last century it has had no rival. It is as sculpture we should approach it.[87]

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[85] The most comprehensive description of the exhibition based upon extensive archival research is Virginia-Lee Webb's book *Perfect Documents: Walker Evans and African Art, 1935* (New York: Harry N. Abrams and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000). Webb also wrote about the portfolio in an article entitled "Art as Information: The African Portfolios of Charles Sheeler and Walker Evans," *African Arts* 24, no. 1 (January 1991): 56-63, 103-104.

[86] Interestingly, the same assertion had been made almost twenty years earlier by Alfred Stieglitz, who exhibited African art alongside European modernist works at his gallery 291 in 1914 and 1915, and it is curious the MoMA's curators would disregard this precedent in their press releases for *African Negro Art*.

[87] The Museum of Modern Art, "African Negro Art Exhibit to Open," (March 6, 1935). http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/press_archives/1930s/1935.

By the time the exhibition closed in April, it had received more than 45,000 visitors, making it among the most popular exhibitions in MoMA's history. The exhibition was also one of the museum's earliest attempts to reach out to African American communities in New York, an effort which the museum credited with increasing attendance by six percent.[88] Philosophy professor and writer Alain Locke, one of the foremost figures of the Harlem Renaissance, reviewed the show enthusiastically: "Having learned the similarities of African art and modernist art, we are at last prepared to see their differences."[89] In his 1925 collection of essays, *The New Negro*, Locke included a text by Albert C. Barnes, titled "Negro Art and America," in which Barnes makes the case for African sculptures as fine art objects: "As art forms, each bears comparison with the great art expressions of any race or civilization," Barnes writes. Locke must have felt some validation, then, at MoMA's approach to the *African Negro Art* exhibition.

The exhibition had an extended life in three different forms. Selected objects in the show traveled to other institutions, providing a modified version of the exhibition at seven museums outside New York. Evans's task was to photograph all of the objects in the original exhibition for a limited edition catalog. From these photographs, he produced an edition of seventeen portfolios, each with 477 images in it. The portfolios were completed in April 1936, and six of them were distributed free of charge to historic black colleges and universities throughout the South. The remaining portfolios were sold to museums, colleges, and a handful of individuals, with one additional free copy given to

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[88] *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 2, no. 6-7 (March-April 1935), n.p.

[89] Alain Locke, "African Art: Classic Style," *American Magazine of Art* 28 (May 1935): 271-272.

the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library.[90] From these photographs, the curators selected 75 to be reprinted and enlarged for a circulating exhibition titled *Photographs of African Negro Art by Walker Evans,* which traveled to 16 locations, most of them black colleges and universities. For many viewers of the Walker Evans "poster" exhibit, the photographs were their first exposure to African art (or, more accurately, to representations of it).[91] As art historian Wendy Grossman writes, "the institution's distribution practice was of no small consequence. Encountered by African American artists at the historically black colleges where they had been donated, Evans's photographs would contribute to the creative work and teaching of individuals such as Lois Mailou Jones and David Driskell."[92] The influence of the photographs on young artists at these colleges has received no scholarly attention, in part because of the way in which the photographs have been understood as a kind of historical document—in this case, the images are so tied up with the objects they represent that the two have often been conflated. Scholars of African art have used the images as teaching and research tools, often without considering their compositional strategies within Evans's body of

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[90] Art historian Robert Goldwater purchased one of the portfolios, which he used to teach courses in African art at New York University. Subsequently, Goldwater became the first director of the Museum of Primitive Art; his annotations and notes made about the photographs trace changes in the attribution and scholarship surrounding the objects. Goldwater's portfolio was donated to the Museum of Primitive Art. That museum's collection was later merged with that of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

[91] Wendy Grossman also makes this point in her review of *Perfect Documents: Walker Evans and African Art, 1935* by Virginia-Lee Webb, *African Arts* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 92-93.

[92] Wendy Grossman, "From Ethnographic Object to Modernist Icon: Photographs of African and Oceanic Sculpture and the Rhetoric of the Image," *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation* 23, no. 4 (2007): 322.

work or within the exhibition strategies of MoMA. Scholars of modern art and photography have disregarded the photographs for the same reason—because of their uneasy role as documents. Art historian Wendy Grossman writes, "The subjects often clouded the aesthetic analysis of Evans's depictions of them."[93] She adds, "No matter how artfully constructed or framed, these photographs cling to the stubborn myth of the medium as representing unmediated and transparent reflections of reality."[94] Partly as a result of their complicated relationship to documentary, the photographs exist in a sort of historical limbo.

Evans spent a month photographing the objects in *African Negro Art*. Because the exhibition opened before he began photographing, he shot the objects at night, after the museum closed to visitors. With the help of several assistants, Evans had each object removed from its case and placed against a plain backdrop (Figure 10). While he took long exposures with an 8x10 camera, an assistant moved a light in circles around the object, illuminating it from several different sides. The effect of this lighting in the final photographs is an absence of shadows behind the work and a soft glow from an unidentifiable origin reflecting off many of the objects. As he did in the architectural photographs he took in the South, Evans made his photographs of African sculptures using the trademarks of his particular aesthetic: the photographs are marked by close cropping (even cropping out portions of the sculptures at times), an indistinguishable

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[93] Wendy Grossman, *Man Ray, African Art, and the Modernist Lens* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 14.

[94] Grossman, "Ethnographic Object to Modernist Icon," 321-322.

light source that washes over the object, and an emphasis on each object's lines and textures, even to the detriment of depicting the object as a whole (Figure 11).

Couched between his two trips to New Orleans, Evans's photographs for *African Negro Art* indicate his position at an intersection of African art, images of the South, photography, and museum practices within newly developing modernist strategies of representation.[95] With the *African Negro Art* portfolio and the traveling exhibition of photographs, MoMA's presentation of African art as part of a modernist aesthetic coincided with its positioning of Evans as a master of modern photography.[96] And in both cases, the museum removed the personal and experiential contexts within which the works were created, positioning them instead in relation to definitions of the terms modernism and documentary, respectively.

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Toward the end of 1935, Evans was hired by the RA to photograph scenes of the South, and he used the job as an opportunity to return to New Orleans. Coincidentally, Evans's photographs of the African sculptures were on view at Dillard University in New Orleans during his second visit to the city. During this trip, Evans spent much more time in the city proper, photographing the historical homes and buildings of the French Quarter and studying the signs and advertisements which decorated the city. His

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[95] Wendy Grossman points to this intersection, minus the Southern reference, in her review of *Perfect Documents: Walker Evans and African Art, 1935* by Virginia-Lee Webb. *African Arts* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 92-93. Michael North offers a fascinating study of this relationship, especially as it manifest itself in literature. See Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language & Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[96] Grossman expands upon this point in her book *Man Ray, African Art, and the Modernist Lens* (2010).

photographs focused squarely upon the city's architectural structures; Evans shot each building straight-on, filling his frames with the buildings and leaving little of the surrounding view in his images. In these photographs he also flattens the structures, emphasizing their facades. In his photograph of the Liberty Theater on St. Charles Street, for example, the theater's box office appears to be closed, and there are no people visible in the image (Figure 12). The theater is plastered with movie posters for *The Rainmakers* (1935), a film starring the comedy duo Bert Wheeler and Robert Woolsey. Tie-in advertisements for Morton's Salt—"when it rains it pours"—include posters wallpapering the entranceway and barrels marked with the salt brand name. Evans' image turns the theater façade into a scrim for pattern, line, and contrasts in light and dark. During this trip to New Orleans, Evans seems to have almost entirely avoided or minimized any human subjects. In *Negro House in New Orleans, Louisiana*, for example, several small figures are visible on the upper porch of a wood frame house, and a woman stands in front of the lower porch facing the building, but these figures are dwarfed by the structure (Figure 13). The front of the house is the only part of it which is visible; it appears to be almost as flat and two-dimensional as the Heinz tomato ketchup billboard on the left side of the picture. His emphasis on architecture rather than people distinguished Evans from most of his colleagues at the RA: this compositional approach might be read as an especially modernist style, one detached from the social aspect of the RA's mission. Evans's friend and studio mate Ben Shahn also traveled to New Orleans under the aegis of the Resettlement Administration in 1935 and 1936. Shahn's

photographs of New Orleans are much more emblematic of the work being done by RA photographers, and they make evident the singularity of Evans's aesthetic.

In *Street Scene in New Orleans* (1935), Shahn photographed a man sitting on the front step of a building (Figure 14). He wears a hat, and its brim obscures his eyes. He turns his head slightly to his left. Behind him, a cane rests against the building. His left hand is curled arthritically, and he rests it on his lap. The foundation of the building is cracked, and its shuttered doors are worn and covered with dark smudges, presumably marks from being opened by many hands. A chalkboard sign on the building's exterior announces a celebration for the "Anniversary of Your Beloved Pastor Rev J (G?) Poindexter Beginning Monday Night October 2 and Ending Monday Night October 9 1935. Services Begin Each Night at 7:30 P.M." From the sign, the viewer gathers that the building is a church, and its steps provide a haven for the crippled man. In contrast, another of Shahn's photographs, *In Front of Cathedral, New Orleans, Louisiana*, depicts two white men in suits shown with their backs to the photographer (and viewer) as they greet the priest (Figure 15). Another man stands near them, handing out programs. The two men in suits are mirrored formally by two heavy columns, which are situated behind the priest, and on either side of him. A metal fence separates the cathedral from the people standing on the street. The photograph of the cathedral and its wealthy white patrons throws into relief the poverty of Rev. Poindexter's church. The figure sitting on the stoop in the first photograph calls attention to the church's function as a refuge; in contrast, the cathedral's metal fence dictates that certain people are allowed inside, and others are closed out. The formal structure of the two photographs is also quite similar,

reinforcing the relationship established by their shared subject matter. Both images bring their subject matter into the foreground of the image. Both have strong vertical elements on the exterior of the church buildings (the doors and the columns, respectively). Both have a dark receding space on the right side of the composition (an alley and a church entrance, respectively). The drama of the pairing of these two images is a result of the differences that these formal similarities heighten: differences of race, class, architecture, and the function of each church. When paired, these photographs suggest that Shahn was making a deliberate, politicized comparison.

But while Evans's images were not as overtly political as Shahn's, his photographs of New Orleans were nonetheless marked by his personal experiences and observations in that city. In his photograph captioned *New Orleans garage mechanic* he depicts a white man wearing a hat which reads "New Orleans Auto Supply Co." (Figure 16). The photograph's composition connects it formally to Evans's other architectural photographs: its flattened perspective and emphasis upon light and dark, line and pattern (see the latticework behind the mechanic), indicates that Evans was interested in a particular aesthetic approach to his subject matter, whether the subject was architecture or the human figure. In the photograph, the mechanic stands facing the camera, in a frontal pose which replicates that of the houses Evans photographed. The strong sunlight creates two dark lines of shadows—one across the mechanic's forehead from the brim of his cap, and one across his neck from the angle of his jaw. The image is tightly cropped, showing the man from the chest up. The photograph is a rare portrait in a body of work that was primarily focused upon architecture, and several writers have described it as an extension

of Evans's architectural work (often with some confusion about its place in Evans's *oeuvre*).[97] Evans made the portrait after borrowing a set of coveralls from the mechanic to use as a disguise. After finding out about his wife's affair, Paul Ninas had threatened Evans at gunpoint, and the photographer was justifiably wary about inciting a second dramatic scene. The mechanic loaned him clothes for a surreptitious visit to see Jane before he left New Orleans in the spring of 1936. A few months later, he and Agee traveled south to search for sharecropper subjects.

[97] For example, in his essay for the exhibition catalogue *Walker Evans and Jane Ninas in New Orleans, 1935-1936*, curator Jeff Rosenheim writes, "The bust *Garage Mechanic, New Orleans, January 1936* is unique in the corpus of Evans's New Orleans photographs. This tremendous head, topped proudly with a lettered cap, is the only known RA portrait study before the Alabama tenant farmers of the summer of 1936. It is a brutal image only partially muted by the perceived respect shared by the protagonists. Evans employs the raking January light and stares directly into the mechanic's eyes which unblinkingly stare back. One wonders if the photographer did not see the mechanic's face as a marble bust—its sculptured jaw, high cheekbones, and strong nose relating to his investigation of neoclassical design." *Walker Evans and Jane Ninas in New Orleans*, 10.

OTHER DESCRIPTIONS

Evans made his photographs of New Orleans at a time when the creative community in the French Quarter was flourishing. Many artists there around the same time created images or books which offered descriptive approaches to place and community. Descriptions of the French Quarter in texts such as Lyle Saxon's *Fabulous New Orleans* (1928) and *New Orleans City Guide* (1938), William Woodward's *French Quarter Etchings of Old New Orleans* (1938), and William Spratling and William Faulkner's *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles: A Gallery of Contemporary New Orleans* (1926) take different approaches to objectivity and representation than did the majority of photodocumentary book makers in the 1930s. Each of these texts describes the French Quarter through text and image, but each of them does so through the use of a different genre. Saxon's books are travel guides with narrative essays, illustrative etchings, and information for getting around town. Woodward's book is a collection of etchings, each of which represents a different building in the Quarter, many as if seen at different historical moments. And Spratling and Faulkner's book is a book of caricatures of the Quarter's artistic community, made in the style of Miguel Covarrubias's *The Prince of Wales and Other Famous Americans*, published a year earlier. These New Orleans-centric texts made by locals were premised upon two temporal periods: New Orleans' past as epitomized by the Quarter's historic architecture, and New Orleans' present as represented by the artistic inhabitants of the neighborhood. Unlike many of the FSA photographs taken of New Orleans, the books do not connect

local experience to the national economic climate or to a specific government initiative (although Saxon's *City Guide* was a WPA-sponsored project). Instead, they offer descriptions of the neighborhood for visitors and locals to use as they engaged with the Quarter in their daily lives or on their trips to visit the area. Unlike the photodocumentary books, they presume an actual presence of their viewer in the place represented rather than an imagined presence in the scene depicted. This approach to description—as a type of document created through the lens of local experience and physical presence—also offers a different way of considering documentary photographs of the South in general and Walker Evans's photographs of New Orleans in particular. That is, by considering different ways of describing, we can step away from the debates about documentary photography and its relative objectivity to see how and why descriptive accounts of a place indicate their makers' particular types of presence in that place.

In the *New Orleans City Guide* (1938), a guide to the city edited and compiled by New Orleanian Lyle Saxon, the French Quarter provides the narrative center for information about New Orleans.[98] In the book's preface, Saxon describes the city's unique cuisine—"Generations of gourmands and tipplers have waxed fat on gumbo and bouillabaisse and pompano, and gay on gin fizzes and absinthe drips and Sazerac cocktails…"—and its architectural treasures: "Here one finds the narrow streets with overhanging balconies, the beautiful wrought-iron and cast-iron railings, the great barred

[98] The book was sponsored by the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Saxon was the director of the Louisiana Writers' Program from 1935 to 1942. Richard Megraw's book, *Confronting Modernity: Art and Society in Louisiana* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008) is the best analysis of Saxon's life and career that I have found.

doors and tropical courtyards."[99] Saxon's work on the *New Orleans City Guide* was not his first foray into descriptive accounts of New Orleans. In 1928, he published an idiosyncratic walking guide to the city, entitled *Fabulous New Orleans.* In the chapter of this 1928 guide titled "The New New Orleans," Saxon describes modern New Orleans, with its shipping wharves and race-tracks. He leads the reader on a tour from Canal Street (the southern boundary of the French Quarter) along the Garden District to St. Charles Avenue and the Port. His tone is formal and reserved, and he characterizes certain places as "particularly charming" or "well worth while." He also distances himself and his reader from the newer parts of the city by using an indefinite pronoun: "To continue along St. Charles Avenue…one reaches Audobon Park."[100] He concludes, "It is impossible, of course, for this chapter to drag itself out into a guide to the present day New Orleans. It may be that the reader is tired already… Now let us go back to the French Quarter for an afternoon walk."[101]

In the subsequent chapter, "An Afternoon Walk," Saxon's tone is immediately different. The essay is colloquial, beckoning, and personal, and Saxon urges his reader to "get *your* hat and come along with *me*."[102] He punctuates his sentences with exclamations ("Oh, wait!") and questions addressed to the reader ("Look, do you see the magnolia trees growing there?"). He sprinkles local history and myth into his imaginative conversation

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[99] Federal Writers' Project, *New Orleans City Guide* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1938), xx.

[100] Ibid., 265.

[101] Ibid., 267.

[102] Lyle Saxon, *Fabulous New Orleans* (New York: The Century Co., 1928), 268. Emphasis mine.

with his reader, and he describes the colors, smells, and feelings that each place elicits for him. As he continues along Royal Street, Saxon arrives at the building that houses the New Orleans Arts & Crafts Club. He writes, "If you are interested in exhibitions of paintings, there will be something for you to see in the studio beyond the court. Once this was the house of Brulatour, the richest wine merchant in New Orleans. … On damp days, if you climb to the *entresol* you can still smell the faint vinegary odor left behind."[103] Here Saxon's sensory description of the place hints at the building's past as he invites the visitor to experience the building and its musky smells and art exhibitions in the present. In "An Afternoon Walk," Saxon characterizes the French Quarter as a place which exists in a different temporality than that of the "New New Orleans": "We will leave Canal Street at Royal, and turn from our present-day world into the past." He is sentimental about the crumbling architecture and the "lingering charm" of a "bygone" time. But, while describing the Quarter as a place of the past, he also narrates a walk through the neighborhood as it existed in 1928, and he indicates his familiarity with the contemporary art community which showed its work there.

Saxon's tour of the French Quarter suggests three important processes that his description of place enacts. First, it underscores local identity—in this case, positioning Saxon as an insider in the neighborhood he describes (in contrast to the new New Orleans emerging outside the Quarter, from which Saxon feels bored and distanced). Second, it appeals to nostalgia for the place's past, showing how locals responded to change and resisted the city's modernization. And third, it constructs a narrative that invites the

[103] Ibid., 274-275.

reader to follow the story, relating to it through its familiarity—both structural (as part of a familiar travel guide *genre*), and grammatical ("you" versus "one"). The effect of this writing strategy is that the reader also imagines herself being invited to become an insider, a local. This sense of insiderness is heightened by the way Saxon moves his reader through the Quarter. The experience of walking through neighborhoods and seeing many different structures while reading Saxon's accounts of their histories, functions, and sensory existence in the present would be quite different from the experience of viewing Walker Evans's photographs of buildings and signs, which use frontality to eliminate the movement of walking through.

Many of the artists who lived and worked in the Quarter throughout the 1920s and 1930s felt a strong, shared commitment to their neighborhood because they believed it to be fragile and on the verge of being demolished. In 1917, the St. Louis Hotel and the Old Spanish Tile Roof Building—considered the oldest structure in the city—were torn down. Two years later, the French Opera House burned to the ground. In his book *French Quarter Etchings of Old New Orleans* (1938), printmaker and art professor William Woodward methodically illustrates the buildings of the Quarter, connecting them to the mythos of the "old" New Orleans, and attempting to preserve them in the face of the encroaching modernization of the city. The French Quarter provides Woodward with the core of his visual descriptions of the "old New Orleans," as it did also for Saxon in *Fabulous New Orleans.* In his book, Woodward pairs 54 etchings, most of which illustrate the historical buildings of the Quarter, with short textual descriptions of each building's style, history, and use. Each etching was based upon a painting or crayon

drawing completed by Woodward over a period of 40 years, and each etching is also captioned with the date of the original painting upon which it was based and the name of the structure or street it represents. For example, the first plate in the book is captioned "'Au Rendezvous des Compagnons de l'Art Culinaire.' The Rendezvous of the Companions of Culinary Art—Chartres Street—in 1904" (Figure 17). A short descriptive text follows the caption: "New Orleans is world famous for the art displayed in its 'cuisines' or kitchens, and its Creole recipes of French or Spanish origin include gumbo, jambalaya, bouillabaisse, crawfish bisque, calas, pralines, and many other delectables."[104] As it did in Saxon's *New Orleans City Guide,* food—bouillabaisse specifically!—marks the first page of Woodward's book, the first entrance into the city's local culture. The corresponding etching is an image of the entrance to the two-story building, with its second story balcony above. A row of leafy plants on the balcony attest to the area's tropical climate. Woodward includes two figures in the scene: a female figure placed on the sidewalk near the restaurant's sign indicates the scale of the building, and a male figure seated inside the doorway holding a newspaper up to his face provides some depth to Woodward's representation of the building's interior. In the captions for other etchings in the book, Woodward references bygone practices of daily life – "Horse and Wagon Days" on Chartres Street in 1905, for example, or "Two-Wheeled Milk Cart" in front of the Café Renaissance on Chartres Street in 1905. Etchings of buildings such as the French Opera House and the St. Louis Hotel include captions noting their destruction,

[104] William Woodward, *French Quarter Etchings of Old New Orleans* (New Orleans: Magnolia Press, 1938), plate 1.

and Woodward notes that there is a movement "on foot" to restore the Opera House. Woodward's book participated in the movement to preserve the Quarter through its insistence upon the value of the city's historical architecture.

Figures appear in several of the Woodward's etchings, sometimes as small indistinct compositional elements and other times as the central component of an image. In plate 49, for example, (captioned "Negress on Levee Carrying Bundle on her Head"), Woodward created an image of a black female figure standing, one hand on her hip and the other balancing the load on her head (Figure 18). Her skirt appears to billow in the wind. The levee, however, is the image's primary subject. Its nondescript appearance—Woodward did his best to make it visually interesting by sketchily marking the sprigs of grass along it—required the presence of some other visual element to give the image its balance. The narrative caption reads, "Until comparatively recent times the top of the levee was used by pedestrians and sometimes by vehicles. It was an old custom to walk along the levee in the evening."[105] Above the woman's head in the image, Woodward added patches of lines, squiggles which fill the otherwise blank sky space, and which appear to be the steam from a nearby ship.

In his emphasis upon architecture, Woodward's etchings offer a natural formal comparison to Evans's photographs of New Orleans structures. Plate 6, for example, of "Restaurant of the Renaissance" on Chartres Street presents a view long-ways down a street of shop-fronts (Figure 19). In the foreground of the image, the artist has included depictions of two signs for the café; one on the side of the building, and one hanging

[105] Wm. Woodward, *French Quarter Etchings*, plate 49.

from the ceiling of the building's shaded awning. As in many of Evans's images, the signs occupy an important visual space, and they weight the depiction of the architecture here. As in many of the etchings in the collection, Woodward includes stereotypically rendered black figures to balance the composition. The narrative caption for this plate focuses upon the sidewalk (which we are told is customarily called the "banquette"). These two figures are included, then, not only as a visual counterbalance to the street signs, but because Woodward intended them to draw the viewer's eye to the sidewalk: the female figure stands barefoot on the sidewalk and wields a broom as a small male figure pours a bucket of water on the sidewalk to clean it. Although a sidewalk is an animate structure only so much as it is used, here the human figures are included in the image only to draw attention to the sidewalk: it is a strange aesthetic decision, and one that we might imagine Evans also making. Indeed, the figures that happen to stand or sit near the buildings Evans photographs often seem to be included only out of necessity: they serve to indicate the building's use or to demonstrate the scale of a structure or sign. Woodward's decision to use black figures to weight his images indicates his participation in a common objectification of the black body and its labor.

Another striking similarity between Woodward's taxonomy of the Quarter's architecture and Evans's series of New Orleans photographs is his inclusion of a single portrait in the series (here I refer back to Evans's photograph of a mechanic). Woodward's portrait is of a woman, seen in profile, who wears her hair tied up in a patterned scarf (Figure 20). The image is captioned "Negro Mammy Wearing Creole 'Tignon' Style of Headdress-1915" and the corresponding narrative caption reads:

> The word 'Creole' given by the Creoles themselves to their slaves and mammies, to the tignons or headdress they wore, to the patois or dialect which they spoke, to the dishes which they cooked, and in general to things used by the Creoles, caused a misunderstanding in many quarters of the meaning of the word 'Creole' in Louisiana. A Creole is a descendant of the white people who emigrated from Europe to Louisiana during the colonial period that is before 1803.[106]

The short caption is organized exactly as the captions for his architectural images are: it is descriptive of its subject's formal qualities, and it provides a specific year for the image. Here Woodward works within the conventions of portraiture: the woman sits in profile, wearing clothes which indicate something about her identity, and Woodward has rendered her facial features more thoroughly than he does for any other figures illustrated in the book. But in contrast to Evans's abstraction of the mechanic's face into a formal study, in this image Woodward suggests a human taxonomy. Woodward's image illustrates a signifier for "Creole": the woman is a necessary visual component because she anchors the image of the "tignon" headdress, the real subject of the image. By including a narrative caption that defines a specific ethnic/racial category and by leaving the portrait's subject anonymous, Woodward insistently presents a case for the preservation—the freezing in time—of not only the neighborhood's architecture but also the city's racial classifications. The *Old New Orleans* in his book's title is locked in the past, unable to allow for fluidity, movement, or change in the present. *The Old New Orleans*, as Woodward represents it, exists in the structures which host, delimit, and confine human experience in that place, not in the human experience itself.

[106] Wm. Woodward, *French Quarter Etchings,* plate 42.

The designation "Creole" had changing (and sometimes conflicting) meanings in New Orleans. By the end of the 19th century, some white New Orleanians clung to a rigid definition of the term, which was based upon the idea that "the word can never be used except to designate a native Louisianian of pure white blood descended from those French and Spanish pioneers who came directly from Europe to colonize the New World. Thus even Acadians, or Cajuns, are rigorously excluded, having arrived in the colony not straight from the Continent but by way of Canada."[107] This 19th century definition leads to the attribution "creoles of color" for individuals who were not white (a problematic adjectival designation that one historian compares to "creole tomatoes"). The definition also does not sync with historical usage, which has always also included Creoles of African descent. Since the 1600s the term has designated someone born elsewhere from someone born locally, in the New World.[108]

The term "Creole" appears again in the title of another locally-produced artist book: in *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles: A Gallery of Contemporary New Orleans* (1926), William Spratling and William Faulkner describe contemporary New Orleans by caricaturing members of the city's artistic community as it existed in the

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[107] Joseph R. Tregle Jr. "Creoles in America," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. Arnold R. Hirsch (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 133.

[108] In his *Royal Commentary of the Inca*, written in the early 1600s, Garcilaso de la Vega writes "The name was invented by the Negroes. … They use it to mean a Negro born in the Indies, and they devised it to distinguish those who come from this side and were born in Guinea from those born in the New World. … The Spanish have copied them by introducing this word to describe those born in the New World, and in this way both Spaniards and Guinea Negroes are called *criollo* if they are born in the New World." Arnold R. Hirsch, ed., *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 137.

French Quarter in the 1920s.[109] Here the term designates members of the community—it serves as an indicator of the insider-status of the figures depicted. The book includes drawings of 42 artists and writers working in New Orleans in the 1920s, many accompanied by humorous captions.[110] The book's frontispiece, captioned "The Locale, Which Includes Mrs. Flo Fields," depicts the buildings of the French Quarter, all filled with writers and artists (Figure 21). Interspersed among the landmarks (including Le Petit Theatre de Vieux Carré and St. Louis Cathedral), writers peer out of windows and artists climb onto rooftops, presumably to better see their surroundings. On the street, labels draw attention to "Alberta" (Kinsey) and "Our Flo" (Fields). A woman marked as "Creole" stands on a balcony overlooking the street. This figure is only one part of a diverse mix of people in the neighborhood; the people in the image are defined by their occupations and their locations.[111] Arrows pointing in opposite directions indicate that there are "More Artists, Writers, Etc." on Jackson Square and Royal Street.[112] In Faulkner's introduction to *Sherwood Anderson*, he writes in a tone quite similar to

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[109] It had a limited print run of 400 copies, with a second printing of 150 copies the following year. William Spratling and William Faulkner, *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles* (1926; repr., Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1966).

[110] There is a large body of scholarship on the literary scene that existed in New Orleans during the 1920s and 1930s. See especially: Richard S. Kennedy, ed., *Literary New Orleans in the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); Judy Long, ed., *Literary New Orleans* (Athens, Ga.: Hill Street Press, 1999); and Tracey Ann Watts, "A Jungle of Anxious Desires: representing New Orleans, 1880-2005" (PhD dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 2009).

[111] None of the artists depicted, however, are people of color—here white is the presumed normal for members of the community.

[112] Forty years after publishing *Sherwood Anderson*, William Spratling reminisced: "It was the twenties. Sherwood Anderson, Faulkner, Roark Bradford, people who were going places later on were there, and it was a very vivid epoch." Robert David Duncan, "William Spratling's Mexican World," in Spratling and Faulkner, *Sherwood Anderson*, 75.

Saxon's: "First, let me tell you something about our Quarter, the Vieux Carré. … Do you know our quarter, with its narrow streets, its old wrought-iron balconies and its Southern European atmosphere?"[113] Faulkner continues by describing a kind of utopia, its streets thronged with artists:

> … as one walks about the quarter one sees artists here and there on the shady side of the street corners, sketching houses and balconies. I have counted as many as forty in a single afternoon, and though I did not know their names nor the value of their paintings, they were my brothers. And in this fellowship where no badges are worn and no sign of greeting is required, I passed them as they bent over their canvasses, and as I walked onward I mused on the richness of our American life that permits forty people to spend day after day painting pictures in a single area comprised in six city blocks.[114]

The images in *Sherwood Anderson* rely upon the viewer's familiarity with the figures depicted and with their artistic activities, including recent local exhibitions. For example, Spratling's caricature of Daniel Whitney depicts the man wearing a dress, shown in duplicate (Figure 22). The caption reads: "Daniel Whitney: From the Portrait Now at the Arts & Crafts Club." A caricature of Grace King replicates the style of *Portrait of Miss Grace King* (1926) by Wayman Adams, which shows King regally presiding over the activities of Le Petit Salon, a women's literary club in New Orleans (Figures 23-24). These images require the reader to be familiar with the French Quarter, its artists, its exhibitions, and its organizations to get the joke.[115]

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[113] Wrought-iron balconies, apparently, are a central component for narrative descriptions of the Quarter. Spratling and Faulkner, *Sherwood Anderson*, n.p.

[114] Ibid.

[115] In his 1939 novel *The Wild Palms*, Faulkner creates an outsider to the Quarter's creative community. In that novel, the character Wilbourne is shocked and then bemused to discover the existence of the artistic community that exists in the French Quarter. The ability to paint, to play the piano, and to throw

Spratling and Faulkner's collaborative image of the Quarter in *Sherwood Anderson* represents a New Orleans in which the architecture comes alive with human activity. Even in the act of collaboration, Spratling and Faulkner suggest a different definition of the French Quarter than the one Woodward posits: their image is one which emphasizes community, while Woodward's image of the Quarter is tied to individual experience. The reader of Woodward's book could, of course, walk to the buildings included in the book. The reader could compare the images to the buildings in person. But the book could also function perfectly well removed from its referents. It could be made sense of from a distance of time or space. Woodward's images become signifiers for the structures as he imagined them to exist in the past. In contrast, the reader of *Sherwood Anderson* had to be familiar with the people, the art, and the community—in the present—to understand that book's imagery. Read at a distance from the world they depict, the images lose many of their referents.

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extravagant parties is entirely foreign to Wilbourne's life of work and study. Wilbourne—raised in the Ozarks—is emphatically not from the Quarter:

> … the noise—the piano, the voices—a longish room, uneven of floor, the walls completely covered with unframed paintings which at the moment impacted upon Wilbourne with that inextricable and detailless effect of an enormous circus poster seen suddenly at close range, from which vision, the very eyeballs, seem to start violently back in consternation. He had seen photographs and reproductions of such in magazines before, at which he had looked completely without curiosity because it was completely without belief, as a yokel might look at a drawing of a dinosaur. But now the yokel was looking at the monster itself and Wilbourne stood before the paintings in complete absorption. It was not at what they portrayed, the method or the coloring; they meant nothing to him. It was in a bemusement without heat or envy at a condition which could supply a man with the obvious leisure and means to spend his days painting such as this and his evenings playing the piano and feeding liquor to people whom he ignored…[115]

Wilbourne is startled and then absorbed by the paintings he sees on the wall. His response mirrors Faulkner's own (perhaps facetious) surprise in *Sherwood Anderson* that so many people could have the leisure time to make art. Wilbourne's ill-fated love affair with an artist in that community never entirely erases his feeling of being out of place in the Quarter; throughout the novel, the two lovers try to escape the clutch of the art world that alienates him.

THE MAGIC OF NEW ORLEANS

One of the caricatures in *Sherwood Anderson* is of Ellsworth Woodward, William's brother (Figure 25). Spratling draws only Ellsworth's head. The figure seems to peer out from the page, his round glasses framed by thick eyebrows. His serious expression appears thoughtful and paternal. Ellsworth played an important role in the New Orleans art world; he directed several of the city's art institutions. From 1890 to 1931 he was the chair of the art department at Tulane's women's college, where he directed the Newcomb School of Pottery.[116] He was also a founder of the New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA, then the Isaac Delgado Museum), and he was the museum's director from 1925 to 1939. After retiring from Newcomb College in 1931, he worked as the Southern regional leader of the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), a New Deal arts program that hired artists to create murals, easel paintings, prints, and portraits. As historian Richard Megraw notes, Ellsworth Woodward was the "patriarch of the New Orleans art world" and he "held dominion over the local art scene in a benevolent suzerainty spanning four decades."[117]

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[116] For histories of the Woodward brothers' contributions to Tulane and the Newcomb School, see Judith Bonner, *Newcomb Centennial, 1886-1986* (New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 1987); and Jean Moore Bragg and Susan Saward, *The Newcomb Style: Newcomb College Arts & Crafts and Art Pottery* (New Orleans: Jean Bragg Gallery, 2002).

[117] Richard Megraw, *Confronting Modernity: Art and Society in Louisiana* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 29, 30. As Megraw notes, to date there is no critical biography of Woodward, despite his omnipresence in the New Orleans art world. For the purposes of this dissertation, I consider his work primarily with the SSAL; much work remains to be done on Woodward's other projects.

Among his other institutional projects, Ellsworth was also the president of the Southern States Art League (SSAL) from its inception in 1922 until his death in 1938.[118] The SSAL was his most concerted effort at developing a regional community of artists. Through it he hoped to bring together disparate groups of artists from across the South, to educate amateur Southern artists, to develop a Southern audience for fine arts, and to create an organization which could present Southern art to a national audience.[119] Woodward's definitions of Southern community developed and changed slightly over the course of his career, but he repeatedly returned to two factors he believed united artists in the region. The first was the residual impact of the Civil War upon arts education and art collecting in the South, which he describes in a 1923 article published in *The Art Bulletin:* "the tragic dissipation… of all material resources, the collapse of social momentum, [and] the isolation of the South for two generations from the stimulating contact of world events,"[120] he argues, contributed to the region's "inactivity in art." Further, the South's agricultural and commercial (rather than industrial) economy was ill-

[118] The organization solicited membership from practicing artists who had been born in the South or had resided there for at least five years after the age of 18, and it defined the South to include only specific states. These included: Alabama, Arkansas, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. By 1930, the SSAL had 653 members, with 526 active members and 57 organizations that acted as sustaining members—including 15 museums or galleries and 15 art schools or college art departments.

[119] The SSAL modeled itself after the American Federation of Arts and the National Academy of Design. SSAL Historical Sketch with Revised Constitution and By-Laws for Year 1929-30. March 1930. SSAL Archives, Tulane University.

[120] Ellsworth Woodward, "Present Day Art in the South: Cause and Effect," *The Art Bulletin* 6, no. 1 (September 1923), 8-10.

equipped to support artists. Artists working in the South, then, faced a shared set of adversities that included a lack of financial support, education, and popular interest.

Woodward's second preoccupation was the magnetism northern cities (especially New York) held for young Southern artists. "The aim and purpose of the [Southern States Art] League," he writes in 1935, "is to reverse the drift of thought in the South away from New York and her unconscious dominance towards a more wholesome psychology which some fine day will achieve a new vision of the South."[121] Here Woodward seems to turn to the trope of North versus South to encourage beleaguered Southern artists to develop a shared sense of regional pride.

Woodward's sustained attempts to create a regional artistic community draw from his belief in the important role place played in the development of an artist's style. In an unpublished lecture titled "The Magic of New Orleans" and dated 1938, he describes wandering through New Orleans, fascinated by its sights, smells, and its history: "One's nostrils are teased by the odor of tobacco, coffee, molasses, the distillation of alcohol and I know not what spicy suggestions of world commerce."[122]

Woodward's interest in the "phenomena of local life" underpinned his lectures and articles throughout the 1930s. He frequently urged his listeners and readers not to travel to New England or Europe, but to find artistic inspiration at home, in the South.

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[121] Ellsworth Woodward, "Address of President Ellsworth Woodward to the Fifteenth Annual Convention of the Southern States Art League at The Parthenon, Nashville, Tennessee," April 4, 1935, Tulane Archives.

[122] Ellsworth Woodward, "The Magic of New Orleans" unpublished manuscript dated Feb. 10, 1938. Ellsworth Woodward Papers, Tulane University, 2.

"Art is not over the horizon in some more fortunate place, but here, and the stuff with which it deals should be our thought [sic], our feelings, and experiences," he writes in 1935. "The Southern artist—if he be an artist—has an obligation to observe, to feel, and to express the qualities of his environment and the society of which he is a part."[123] The feeling one held for a place, Woodward writes, should be the primary subject for artists. Without an emotive sensitivity to a place's history, architecture, design, people, smells, foods, weather, and vegetation, among other things, Woodward believed the artist would never be able to authentically depict her surroundings. According to Woodward's philosophy, it was impossible to accurately represent the South from an outsider point of view.

In his "Magic of New Orleans" lecture, Woodward references an essay by Violet Paget[124] entitled "The Genius Loci: Notes on Places" (1899) in which Paget describes feelings of friendship with specific places.[125] She writes, "To certain among us, undeniably, places, localities … become objects of intense and most intimate feeling. … they can touch us like living creatures; and one can have with them friendship of the

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[123] Ellsworth Woodward, "Address to the Fifteenth Annual Convention of the Southern States Art League. Nashville, Tennessee," April 4, 1935. Tulane University archives. He echoes this thought in most of his subsequent public lectures. "If art is what we say it is—namely, a means by which true values and emotions find expression—it becomes apparent that we should foster education at home, an education which will put a premium and a fine edge upon the revelation of well-beloved and familiar phenomena of local life. We may freely admit that art is based upon universal principles, but we should not fail to recognize its parochial origin."

[124] Published under Paget's pseudonym, Vernon Lee.

[125] Vernon Lee, *Genius Loci: Notes on Places* (1899; repr., New York: John Lane Company, 1908).

deepest and most satisfying sort."[126] She calls this power of the landscape *genius loci*, and she describes it as an unconscious impulse; she writes that one's surroundings direct one's movements, and they influence one's emotions. The *genius loci*, Paget writes, can be felt in an "individual monument or feature of the landscape. … at a given turn of a road; or a path cut in terraces in a hillside… which draw our feet and thoughts time after time, we know not why or wherefore."[127] In his lecture, Woodward describes the *genius loci* as "a personality and charm" found in certain places, which "exerts a spell over sensitive souls yielding themselves to its influence."[128] Woodward's own paintings were often impressionistic renderings of subject matter close to his heart. In his painting *Backyard in Covington*, he painted the heavy branches of an orange tree, bits of sun reflecting off the fruit's skin and green shadows lining their back sides (Figure 26). The canvas is crammed with plant life—a small, picket fence is overwhelmed with greenery, surrounded with tropical palms, and thickly rendered shrubs and trees. The warmth of the scene, the sensual nature of the plants, and the domestic context for the painting all get at the intimacy of feeling Woodward had for the place, his summer home. Woodward's reading of Paget provided him with a term—*genius loci*—for a painting technique he advocated throughout his career:

> We have before us a landscape. How will you go about reducing it to a painted picture? Everything your eye rests upon has equal value. Sky, trees, grass, road, whatnot. If you are to imitate these things, you are defeated before you begin. No,

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[126] Ibid., 3-4.

[127] Ibid., 6.

[128] Woodward, "Magic of New Orleans," 1.

> if we are to produce a work of art, we must select, arrange, eliminate, simplify and *bend all we see to what we feel*—this, I take it, is technique as applied to art.[129]

Without using the word "Modernism," here Woodward seems to describe one of the general defining tenets of Modern art: that the construction of the work relies upon the artist's use of materials and interpretation of a scene, rather than the image's identifiable representation of its referent. A decade later, art critic Clement Greenberg would formulate his canonical definition of modernism, taking Woodward's idea further to describe work that was concerned only with itself and its aesthetic—"the arrangement and invention of spaces, surfaces, shapes, colors, etc." to the exclusion of anything else.[130] Greenberg's definition of modernism, unlike Woodward's *genius loci*, does not take the artist's process of feeling into consideration, and here is the key break between the two ideas: Greenberg's writings describe a type of art-making in which the central component was not an affective one, while Woodward insisted upon the importance of feeling in art. In this, Woodward was more allied with 19th century Victorian ideals than with the variant of modernism Greenberg described. Both men were writing about abstraction, but from different temporal perspectives.[131]

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[129] Ellsworth Woodward, "Technique in Painting." Lecture given at the Isaac Delgado Museum of Art, 1929. Tulane Archives.

[130] See especially Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* (Fall 1939), reprinted in Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 1:9 and Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Forum Lectures* (Washington, 1960), reprinted in Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 4:87.

[131] In a future iteration of this project, I plan to take a more expansive look at different approaches to modernisms in New Orleans. For example, Woodward's ideas could be very productively discussed in

Woodward went so far as to suggest that only Southern-born artists could represent the region's specific *genius loci.* In an address he gave at the 1935 SSAL Conference in Nashville, he lamented that he was not a "native" Southerner:

> When you Southerners go to Cape Cod, Provincetown, and Gloucester, you can paint your heads off, but New England artists can paint those scenes better than you ever will. …Now, I tell you candidly no Yankee artist, however skillful, can paint the South. He has never known the sights and sounds and scents in his childhood as you have. I have spent 50 years in the South—I'm more Southern than Jeff Davis in some respects—and when I make these annual pilgrimages to various parts of the South in the spring of the year, and wake up on the Pullman in the morning and see this lovely Southern scene with its incomparable trees and flowers, and hear the song of the mocking-bird, I think what masterpieces I could paint—if I were only a Southerner-born![132]

In the speech, Woodward (perhaps facetiously, perhaps in all seriousness) situates himself as an outsider. In the preface to *Sherwood Anderson,* Faulkner used the term "outlander" to describe himself: "[The Quarter] has a kind of ease, a kind of awareness of the unimportance of things that *outlanders like myself—I am not a native*—were taught to believe important," he writes.[133] Faulkner points out that in the French Quarter there were people who were natives to the neighborhood and others who were outsiders. Community, in both of these cases, is defined by divisions between inside and outside. In both cases, the "outlanders" are the people who articulate the parameters of the place and

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relation to a series of lectures Gertrude Stein gave in the United States in 1935; Stein visited New Orleans and spoke to the New Orleans Arts and Crafts Club in February of that year.

[132] Ellsworth Woodward, "Address to the Fifteenth Annual Convention of the Southern States Art League. Nashville, Tennessee." April 4, 1935. SSAL Archives, Tulane University.

[133] Spratling and Faulkner, *Sherwood Anderson*, n.p.

the community that exists within it.[134] "Tell about the South," says Quentin Compson's Canadian roommate at Harvard, in Faulkner's 1936 novel *Absalom, Absalom!*. And Quentin answers as if he has just come from one of Ellsworth Woodward's lectures: "You can't understand it. You would have to be born there."[135]

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Ellsworth Woodward has been roundly criticized for his resistance to Modern art and for his influence upon the collecting practices of the art institutions he directed. In her article about the New Orleans Arts & Crafts Club, Laura Clark Brown writes, "[Woodward's] established art institutions took a conservative approach in art acquisition, exhibition and training, and they contributed little to the spread of modern art and modernism."[136] And in his history of the New Orleans Museum of Art, Prescott Dunbar writes, "the Museum did not receive the donation of even one noteworthy collection, nor did the board of administrators purchase anything remarkable during these years [of Woodward's leadership]. A series of art-appreciation lectures was initiated, yet

[134] In light of the documentary photography program's strong presence in the South in the 1930s, we can consider Woodward's writings about the *genius loci* and Southern identity as part of a historically specific interest in representation and affect. For the FSA, truthfulness of representation was asserted through the genre of documentary photography and the images elicited affective responses from their viewers. For Woodward, truthfulness of representation came from the identity of the artist and her feeling for the South. This is an especially interesting position to take, given how many of the FSA photographers canvassing the South were not southerners.

[135] William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Vintage International Edition, 1990).

[136] Laura Clark Brown, "New Orleans Modernism: The Arts and Crafts Club in the Vieux Carré, 1919-1939," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 41, no. 3 (Summer 2000), 320.

not one major painting or sculpture was added to the Museum's permanent collection."[137] The museum under Woodward's leadership, Dunbar argues, became a repository for "mediocre" and "provincial" art. Dunbar complains that Woodward's sole contribution to NOMA was the development of a "community spirit"—in Dunbar's view, a sad substitute for paintings by Modern masters (preferably ones from Europe).[138]

As president of the SSAL, Woodward created a regular bulletin, an annual conference and exhibition, and traveling exhibitions. These are the most sustained and expansive attempts at defining and documenting Southern art to date. In particular, the bulletin served an important function. It recorded and disseminated information to a wide readership across the South. In it, Woodward listed announcements from other arts organizations and summer art schools, provided museum news and a record of conventions, and reprinted speeches given at the annual conferences. The bulletin also provided personal news about members, including celebrations and obituaries. It offered its readers a sense of the regional community Woodward was stitching together, and it provides the clearest archival articulation of the Southern art world as it existed in the 1920s and 1930s. In the fall of 1932, for example, the bulletin included the following list of announcements:

> At the request of the University of Alabama, a Program on Southern Art for Women's Clubs has been prepared, and mimeographed copies can be obtained from the headquarters. Carolina Art Association is sending out Circuit Exhibitions by Charleston artists from the Gibbes Art Gallery. The work of Alice R.H. Smith

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[137] Prescott N. Dunbar, *The New Orleans Museum of Art: the First Seventy-five Years* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 42-43.

[138] Ibid., 42.

> was praised in a recent issue of McCall's magazine. The Art Association of New Orleans showed work of Betty McArthur in the Delgado Museum in October, and these were shown by the Eastman Memorial Foundation in Laurel, Miss., in November, while the Eighth Exhibition Without Jury was held by the Art Association of New Orleans. A painting by Florence Ezell Stevenson was added to the Vanderpoel Art Gallery in Chicago. The Museum of Fine Arts of Houston held a showing of etchings by Ellsworth Woodward in October, while another group of his prints was shown in Washington, D.C.[139]

These threads—lists of names, galleries, works of art, and clubs—offer an early outline for the writing of the region's art history. Although many of these artists were widely known (inside and outside the South) in the 1920s and 1930s, they have subsequently been forgotten, sometimes even in their hometowns. The bulletin offers a starting point, a reference guide and archive to unwritten histories. As with Spratling and Faulkner's document of the French Quarter community in *Sherwood Anderson*, later readers must excavate these references to understand their relationships to the larger community they represent.

Through Woodward's archival and documentary impulse, he showed a remarkable sensitivity to the future. He created an extensive paper trail that recorded the activities and works of his Southern community of artists, and he spent considerable energies to develop art schools and museums in the South. He believed that an arts education was the foundation upon which a regional artistic community could grow and sustain itself over time. "All the weary anxiety suffered by the executive staff would disappear if our membership really understood how completely the future of this

[139] SSAL Bulletin VIII, nos. 7-8., October-November 1932. Tulane Archives. Starting with this edition of the bulletin, the SSAL decided to publish its bulletin every other month because of the economic climate and financial difficulties.

organization depends upon them," Woodward reminded his audience at the 1938 SSAL convention in Montgomery.[140] Woodward's imagined regional community was one that extended into the future. At the 1939 annual convention of the SSAL, vice president James Chillman delivered the organization's annual address, which was dedicated to Woodward's memory. With his passing in February of that year, Woodward left behind an organization which had to find new leadership and consider its future. Chillman noted the challenges in defining a regional community. He urged the SSAL to continue to be

> an organization, while respectful of the past, and hinting of prophecy for the future, still lives and acts in the present, speaking of a 20th century world in a 20th century language. … Upon our shoulders then is a responsibility not only to unite by pleasant bonds the people of the South, but to give its artists who speak of today and dream of tomorrow a chance to be heard. A modern league of modern artists in a modern world.[141]

[140] Ellsworth Woodward, "Address to the Eighteenth Annual Convention of the Southern States Art League, Montgomery, Alabama," April 7, 1938. SSAL Archives, Tulane University.

[141] Address of Mr. James Chillman, Jr., Vice President, at the nineteenth annual convention of the Southern States Art League, San Antonio, Texas. March 31, 1939. Tulane Archives.

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Ultimately, the "modern league" of Southern artists envisioned by Woodward and described by Chillman was not the organization that would determine modern representations of the South. Instead, the vision of the South created by Evans and promoted by MoMA quickly eclipsed that made by Woodward and his colleagues. But traces of New Orleans linger in Evans's work. In 1938, Evans had his second one-person exhibition at MoMA. Titled *American Photographs*, the show included photographs which would subsequently appear in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and other photographs taken throughout the South, interspersed with photographs taken in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. The images were also reproduced in a catalog with an essay by Lincoln Kirstein titled "Photographs of America: Walker Evans." The Southern photographs in the exhibition and catalog include a number of New Orleans images: among them are photographs of a boarding house, a row of three boarding houses, a French Quarter building with its distinctive metalwork, and a woman standing in the doorway of a barber shop. *Louisiana Plantation House*, the photograph Evans took of the exterior of Belle Grove Plantation with a fallen tree in front of it also appears. Kirstein writes about these photographs as historical documents, part of a longer trajectory of works which describe American experience:

> The power of Evans' work lies in the fact that he so details the effect of circumstances on familiar specimens that the single face, the single house, the single street, strikes with the strength of overwhelming numbers, the terrible cumulative force of thousands of faces, houses and streets. … Among the many

> practitioners, Evans is one of the few who continues to proceed, enlarging not only his technical apparatus but his historian's view of society. … We recognize in his photographs a way of seeing which has appeared persistently throughout the American past.[142]

Kirstein's effort to locate Evans within a longer narrative of shared American experience is counterbalanced by a modest inscription on the first page of the book, which reads "J.S.N." Evans dedicated the MoMA-sponsored photographic project which would cement the success of his career to Jane.

While New Orleans is a subtle presence in Evans's *American Photographs,* Evans is a dominating presence in the body of photography made in the South during the Great Depression; few photographers of the decade have received anything like the scholarship devoted to him. However, Evans was only one of eight government-sponsored photographers who took photographs of New Orleans in the late 1930s and early 1940s.[143] Among these, Marion Post Wolcott, who was hired by the FSA in 1938 and who photographed New Orleans in 1941, serves as an interesting counterpoint to Evans. Like him, she was not originally from the South. Born in New Jersey, Wolcott spent formative years in Connecticut and in Greenwich Village in New York. She first studied

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[142] Kirstein, "Photographs of America," 199.

[143] The other RA/FSA/OWI photographers were Howard Hollem, Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee, Carl Mydans, Ben Shahn, John Vachon, and Marion Post Wolcott. The photographers in this list, including Evans, are deserving of much more extended attention than what they have received. Each photographer also took a significantly different approach to photographing the city: a comparison of their images of New Orleans challenges any monolithic interpretation of the FSA project as a whole. Mydans's photographs of New Orleans marketplace scenes and Russell Lee's assortment of photographs (which include hand painted signs, real estate developments gone bust, a local saloon, street scenes, and series of photographs of dock workers) are especially rich. Dorothea Lange appears to have only taken two photographs in New Orleans, both of a local monument. Vachon and Hollem's work is marked by the directives of the Office of War Information, which took over the FSA in 1941. Vachon's photographs include a handful of street scenes on and near Canal Street, and a photograph of trucks being unloaded by the Associated Transport Company. Hollem's photographs include color portraits of coast guard officers and images of torpedo boats.

photography in Europe in the early 1930s, when she went to Paris and then Vienna to study dance and child psychology, respectively. As the fascist parties took a stronger hold in Europe, Wolcott became increasingly involved in anti-fascist activities and volunteer projects.[144] Forced by her family to return to New York in 1934, her first published photographs—taken of friends involved with the progressive acting company Group Theater—appeared in *Stage* Magazine.[145] She was subsequently invited to join the New York Photo League, where she met Ralph Steiner and Paul Strand, and in 1937 she was hired as a staff photographer at the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*. At the *Bulletin* she was seen as an anomaly within the all-male photographic department, and she was soon frustrated by the gendered division of assignments at the paper: during her time there, she photographed mostly fashion spreads and events for the ladies' page. In 1938, looking for photographic work that would align more closely with her sense of political responsibility, she joined the FSA staff.

Wolcott was especially interested in the South, and despite Roy Stryker's reservations about sending her on assignments through the region she insisted on spending a months at a time driving through the southern states. Photography historian Alan Trachtenberg describes the appeal the South may have held for photographers with leftist political leanings in the 1930s: "The South as a ground of dissent from a

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[144] For example, after the 1933-1934 bombings of worker's housing in Vienna, Wolcott volunteered her time as a teacher at the school for those workers' children. When anti-Semitic policies began to threaten her friends, she donated time and money to help them escape to the United States. Forced by her family to return to the U.S. around 1934, Wolcott joined the League Against War and Fascism in New York, and taught at a progressive boarding school similar to the one she attended as a child.

[145] See Jack Hurley, *Marion Post Wolcott: A Photographic Journey* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989).

nationality wedded to modernity, corporate capitalism, metropolitanism, and centralized nationalism became a metaphor of difference and otherness."[146] Most of the photographs Wolcott took in New Orleans in 1941 are captioned *Sunday Afternoon in New Orleans* or *Saturday Afternoon in New Orleans*, and many of them appear to have been taken on the same street, over the span of an afternoon. Most of the photographs show people sitting on the front stoops of houses. As they sit, they appear to be smoking, conversing, reading, or watching children play. In her images, the buildings lining the street offer a stage for community interactions.[147] Wolcott's series of photographs of the same locations and her decision to shoot repeated images of informal groups of people create a collective portrait of a community within a specific place. Seen as a series, they also indicate Wolcott's movements as she walked down the street, off and on the sidewalk. Here we see the photographer suggesting her sustained temporal relationship with the place and people there. For example, in a series of six photographs, all captioned *Sunday Afternoon in New Orleans, Louisiana. 1941 Jan.?*, Wolcott studies the interactions and movements of several small clusters of neighbors who sit outside in the late afternoon. In this series of photographs, Wolcott frames and reframes the ways she includes (or excludes) the various people who sit outside in the neighborhood. Most of the photographs indicate neighborly interactions, community ways of being together, being next to each other, and

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[146] Alan Trachtenberg, "Walker Evans's Fictions of the South," *Lincoln's Smile and Other Enigmas* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 307.

[147] Several scholars have written about the impact of air-conditioning on this kind of front-stoop community interaction in the South, suggesting that such community interactions were both regionally and temporally specific. See for example: Raymond Arsenault, "The End of the Long Hot Summer: The Air Conditioner and Southern Culture," *The Journal of Southern History* 50, no. 4 (November 1984): 597-628.

relating to an outsider. They also document Wolcott as outsider, showing the ways she moves through a place to convey a sense of what it is like to be an insider: here we find evidence of her walking, pointing, shooting, moving forward, and moving backward. Rather than photographing her subjects straight-on, she stands in the street or, alternatively, on the sidewalk at a point near the street so that the row of houses is aligned in a sharp angle across the image. In the first photograph, a group of five young women gather on and near the steps of the building closest to the photographer (Figure 27). All five of them turn their heads toward the photographer, as if she has interrupted their conversation. One girl stands with a hand on her hip as she leans against the building. Further down the street, other groups of people sit on other stoops. In a second photograph taken on that street, Wolcott stands on the sidewalk, and again trains her camera on the small groupings of people seated outside their homes (Figure 28). A truck sits parked on the street in the midground of the picture. In this photograph, only one person appears to acknowledge the photographer's presence: a small boy stands and peers out from behind a telephone pole located on the edge of the sidewalk. The boy appears much closer in two subsequent photographs (Figures 29-30). In both, part of his head appears at the lower left corner of the image. In these photographs, he stands in shadow, and the grey tones of the print are at the same level of saturation for him as they are for the sidewalk behind him. His presence is unexpected because of the small portion of his body which is visible and the way he blends into the sidewalk. But his inclusion in the images indicates his interaction with the photographer: first playing hide-and-seek with her, he then runs right up to her and into the immediate line of her camera.

Behind the boy, we see other figures that seem to interact with one another and to acknowledge Wolcott's presence. Two women and a child sit on a stoop, covering their faces with newspaper. It is unclear whether they are blocking the sun or the photographer's lens; perhaps they are trying to block both. The newspapers are the whitest point of the photograph, and they create odd caps for the women; the contrast they create draws the viewer's eye to them. A man seated on the next stoop down turns his head to look down the street, away from Wolcott and toward a woman holding a baby on the next stoop. That woman turns her head toward Wolcott's camera. Further down, the loading or unloading of two trucks continues. A man dressed in light colors appears to be overseeing the work. In one image he sits on a stoop, and in two others he stands against the building. By pairing these images, the viewer is able to imagine this figure's movement and to see his changing place on the dynamic street.

In another photograph in this series, the sidewalk and buildings fill the backdrop of the image; we see no street or sky (Figure 31). Six figures from the previous photographs appear again: the two women with newspaper over their faces, a child curled up on one of these women's laps, the man (who now turns his gaze toward the photographer), and the woman holding a baby (who also turns her gaze in the direction of the photographer). This photograph, when paired with one final photograph in this series, shows Wolcott's movement: in this sixth photograph, Wolcott moves back, across (or to the middle of) the street (Figure 32). She crops the photograph so that it includes part of the street, the sidewalk, and four buildings (two are only partially visible). The woman and the baby are now the only human figures in the photograph, and they sit on the edge

of the stoop. The woman's legs are crossed, and the baby is still on her lap. Her arms wrap around the child. Long shadows of the buildings across the street and the telephone poles on the street darken the lower portion of the image, creeping onto the buildings: they seem to indicate that the time is late afternoon. In an essay about Wolcott, Sally Stein writes that she "was especially attentive to informal group interactions for the way they expressed some of the bonds and boundaries within a community."[148] Wolcott's series of photographs on this unnamed street self-consciously illustrate her sustained relationship to the place, her movements, the interactions of individuals with each other and with her. Here Wolcott makes an effort to suggest, through her photographs, her position as a participant in the street's community over a period of time.

As visitors to the South, both Evans and Wolcott observed their subjects as emblematic of what life in the South looked like. "Can an outsider…come to know a Southern place intrinsically enough to give a reliable account of it?" asks Trachtenberg. Evans's approach of shooting architecture closely, minimizing human figures, and cropping his images tightly so they became formal observations might be understood as suggesting a certain discomfort with the place; his relationship with Jane Ninas seems to have fostered his romance with the buildings and landscapes of Louisiana, but it likely also alienated him from the close-knit community of artists led by Paul Ninas and located in the French Quarter. Wolcott's approach to the discomfort of being an outsider was to try and immerse herself in the idiosyncrasies of one small part of the city; in her *Saturday*

[148] Sally Stein, "Marion Post Wolcott: Thoughts on Some Lesser Known FSA Photographs," *Marion Post Wolcott: FSA Photographs* (Carmel: The Friends of Photography, 1983), 6.

and *Sunday Afternoon* series of photographs, she demonstrates her unfolding relationship to the community of one very specific place. As descriptions of a place and time, the texts and images in this chapter each construct a kind of history. Considered together, they point to the wide sweep of experience and artistic practice that is excluded from histories which champion a particular approach to a Walker Evans way of seeing—a flattening of documentary into the parameters of supposedly objective imagery.[149]

[149] In his essay "The FSA File" Trachtenberg writes: "As fictions, as stories, the photoseries show us that versions of the past are indeed made up. That recognition can free us from the tyranny of any fixed version, permitting critical historical judgment." In *Lincoln's Smile and Other Enigmas* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 298.

CHAPTER TWO

Portraiture and the New Negro:

The Harleston Studio in Charleston, 1922-1931

My portrait is grand. You did a splendid job considering your subject.
- AARON DOUGLAS LETTER TO EDWIN HARLESTON, 1930

The project of 'portraying somebody in her/his individual originality or quality of essence' has come to an end. But portraiture as genre has become the form of new conceptions of subjectivity and new notions of representation.[150]
- ERNST VAN ALPHEN, "THE PORTRAIT'S DISPERSAL"

In 1930, Sue Bailey (later Sue Bailey Thurman) visited Charleston, South Carolina. She was, at the time, the traveling secretary for the national staff of the YWCA, and she was speaking in several Southern cities. Jim Crow segregation barred all African American travelers in the South from staying at public hotels, and so while she traveled Bailey stayed with families who were part of an unofficial network of African American community leaders. In Charleston, she stayed with Elise and Edwin Harleston, two artists whose family owned a funeral home and operated Harleston Hall.[151] Edwin was the first president of the Charleston chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and Elise played an important role in events and activities at

[150] Ernst van Alphen, "The Portrait's Dispersal: Concepts of Representation and Subjectivity in Contemporary Portraiture," in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. Joanna Woodall (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 254.

[151] The Harleston Hall was a space for events hosted by members of Charleston's African American middle class.

the Avery Normal Institute, an elite black high school that she and Edwin had both attended.[152]

Edwin and Elise also owned and operated a portrait studio, located in the heart of the black business district. There, Elise photographed local and visiting sitters, and Edwin painted portraits (often using Elise's photographs as aids to complete his portraits after the sitters left). Situated directly across from the Harleston funeral home, the Harleston Studio had a large plate glass window on the street-level, and Elise hung her photographs there, advertising her services to passersby. She created and sold photographic portraits of black Charlestonians who wanted to commemorate important events such as graduations, engagements, and weddings. During her brief stay in Charleston, Sue Bailey posed for a photograph by Elise and a painted portrait by Edwin. These two images provide a rare surviving example of how closely the Harlestons' portrait practices were intertwined. Because of their shared subject matter—both are images of the same person created at approximately the same time in the same location—the two portraits of Bailey are also interesting to consider individually. Contextualizing them within the specifics of Edwin and Elise's respective artistic practices gives each partner a voice in their collaboration, and it grounds my study of how the Harlestons related to various communities. As a couple, the Harlestons are not a typical case study of "community" per

[152] Although the art historical convention is to write about artists by their last name, in this case I write about Elise and Edwin Harleston using their first names in order to avoid confusion between their works. I realize that the use of their first names also implies a familiarity on my part; after spending months reading their personal letters and journals and meeting members of their extended family, I do feel a certain respectful closeness to them. I also realize that such closeness is an illusion made possible by my role as an archival historian.

se, but they did interact with and participate in a number of different communities, both locally and elsewhere. Their work is emblematic of how artists who are variously considered insiders or outsiders (and these designations change with place and with time) indicate the parameters which define specific communities at various historical moments—in the case of the Harlestons, these communities were the Charleston Renaissance and the Harlem Renaissance.

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Elise photographed Sue Bailey in a seated pose. Bailey's head is turned to her left, and she looks directly at the camera (Figure 33). She sits in a simple wooden chair, and she is draped with a woven shawl which has patterns of alternating thick and thin stripes. A curtain hangs from a rod in the background. This curtain behind Bailey could have framed her entire body, therefore providing a neutral background of subtle texture and line. Instead, Elise pulls back to reveal some of the space of her studio. Light falls on the thick wooden floorboards behind Bailey, and we see a large wooden door behind her, the curtain's loose edge casually tacked to the door frame. It is possible that Elise considered the photograph a study: she frequently took photographs of her husband's portrait subjects so he could work from them while completing a painting. It is also possible that the casual nature of the photograph reveals a friendship between the two women. Elise's photographs of her friends and family repeatedly provide evidence of this kind of inclusive framing in which we see Elise's studio, her home or yard, her shadow. In contrast, her studio portraits (many of which use the same wooden chair we see in Bailey's photograph) have empty backgrounds and are closely cropped around her

subjects. Perhaps what this photograph documents, then, is Bailey's position between these two worlds: that of Elise's professional studio and that of her personal photographic practice.

Edwin titled his painting of Bailey *Portrait of Miss Sue Bailey with the African Shawl* (Figure 34). He likely referred to Elise's photograph while he completed the painting. In the finished portrait, he cropped his image much more tightly than his wife did, choosing instead to depict Bailey from the waist up. The chair falls into shadow, and the curtain in the background disappears and is replaced by a flat wall. Edwin shortened Bailey's arms and added dark shadows behind her left shoulder. In Edwin's painting, Bailey seems younger, her features softened and her skin tone and bone structure refined. Combined, these elements make her seem to sit more erectly than she does in Elise's photograph. The angle of her body also broadens her shoulders; this has the effect of making her seem slightly softer, more maternal. In contrast, in Elise's photograph, her head is turned more sharply, and she looks directly out at the viewer while her body faces the left side of the photograph's border. The title of the painting is somewhat enigmatic: Edwin rarely added descriptors to his studio props, nor did he work with specifically African props or objects in his painting practice, and nothing in the shawl's color scheme or pattern indicates an African origin. Edwin painted Bailey's shawl in bright purples and pinks, strong whites, and with light blue highlights. Edwin's choice to call attention to Bailey's shawl, and link it to an (imaginary?) African origin-point, tells us something important about his personal stakes in painting this portrait. As much as it is an image of Bailey, the portrait is also an image of Edwin at a moment in his career in which he faced

mounting pressure to conform to a new African-based aesthetic emerging in the contemporary New Negro art movement.

In twentieth-century popular usage, the mode of portraiture is often described as capturing some essential quality of psychological insight into a sitter's identity. As John Berger has compellingly argued, however, really what portraits have traditionally conveyed are categories of social types.[153] The pleasure for a sitter in being portrayed, Berger writes, comes from the affirmation of his or her self, seen in relation to his or her position—"monarch, bishop, landowner, merchant and so on."[154] Such accepted social stereotypes are affirmed in portraiture through the sitter's gesture, pose, clothing, background, and perhaps also through objects or other figures included in the scene. The act of making a portrait, then, conveys a social interaction, with human decisions and intentions at its heart; it does not necessarily convey anything about the psychological complexity of the sitter. Portraits, taken without a close study of their making, their makers, and the places/times in which they were made, suggest only presence: at one point in time, one person and another person were in close proximity to one another, and one person made an image which was intended to represent the other person (and even this is not true in all cases). Read contextually, however, portraiture can indicate many broad cultural, social, and historical currents with which the artist (and perhaps the sitter) engaged.

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[153] John Berger, "The changing view of man in the portrait," in *The Moment of Cubism and other essays* (New York: Pantheon, 1969), 41-47.

[154] Ibid., 43.

As with documentary photography, portrait photography is often understood to be a more objective mode of art-making than painting. Susan Sontag writes that a photograph is "a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask."[155] Because analog photographs have a mechanical aspect to them—"light waves reflected by objects"—they have a more direct relationship to mimesis than hand-made images do.[156] And yet, this distinction is something of a red-herring, as Sontag and Berger are quite aware; whether or not portraits are mimetic, they can be interpreted as indicators of the problems of historical and social relations which define one's individuality at a given time. Photography did not replace the act of painting a portrait. Instead, modern experience changed the genre of portraiture into something else: "The crisis of modernity can be seen as the recognition of the irreconcilable split between signified and signifier," writes Ernst van Alphen. "The project of 'portraying somebody in her/his individual originality or quality of essence' has come to an end. But portraiture as genre has become the form of new conceptions of subjectivity and new notions of representation."[157] One historical way of making a portrait—an image of a person that indicates his or her profession—is, as van Alphen writes, now obsolete. This gradual obsolescence was occurring even as the Harlestons set up their portrait studio in Charleston. In their studio between 1922 and Edwin's death in 1931, the Harlestons approached the genre of portraiture aware that many artists considered it an outdated

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[155] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 154.

[156] Ibid.

[157] van Alphen, "The Portrait's Dispersal," 254.

form. It became, for them, a way to contest past modes of stereotypical representation and simultaneously to react to (and resist) the New Negro's modern aesthetic. And yet, even in their gestures of refusal toward the changing styles of painting and photography, the Harlestons demonstrated in their portraits a perceptive awareness of the historical and political stakes behind new modes of representing the black subject.

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Although the popularity of painted portraits and studio photographic portraits was waning with the mass availability at the turn of the twentieth century of various handheld cameras such as the Brownie, the Harlestons both pursued fine art training in which they looked to artistic precedents from the recent past. Edwin completed extensive figure studies and landscapes during his studies at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston; his self-portraits show him standing near an easel and wearing a painting smock, every bit the refined gentleman painter. Elise looked to her photographic predecessors at Tuskegee University, and she created beautifully staged studio portraits and type studies of various black characters (these latter were a popular convention among Tuskegee photographers such as Prentice Hall Polk and Cornelius Marion Battey).

Elise's training in photography included a course at Tuskegee University with Battey, one of the most famous portrait photographers of the early 20th century. He had established his reputation as a photographer in Cleveland and New York City before

being hired in 1916 to start a photography program at Tuskegee.[158] Elise arrived at Tuskegee in October of 1921. Edwin wrote to her from Charleston: "Oh girl, if you will bring away some of the skill and surety that will give you the knack of turning out stuff much like [Battey's work] we'll turn this town upside down – of course I couldn't love you any more because of it – it wouldn't be safe; but find out how it's done. …"[159] How it was done, at least according to Tuskegee's course catalog, was through the mastery of technical skills. The vocational and industrial curricula at Tuskegee emphasized the mechanical processes of photographic practice and darkroom processing.[160] Elise studied, as the university's course catalog flatly describes,

> the essential processes and manipulations involved in negative making, such as, development, intensification, reducing, etc.; … the property of lenses, spherical, and chromatic aberration, astigmatism and curvature of the field, the development of the photographic lens, focal length, aperture, rapidity, image angle, depth of definition, distortion, the comparison and use, etc.

The catalog adds that the photography student would learn to "produce portraiture, understand pictoral photography, and photograph architectural subjects. He must produce

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[158] His series *Our Master Minds* includes portraits of Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Paul Laurence Dunbar, which were sold as prints and postcards. Deborah Willis, *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers, 1840 to the Present* (New York: Norton, 2000), 39.

[159] Letter from Edwin to Elise, Oct. 22, 1921. Collection of Mae Gentry.

[160] The photography program at Tuskegee was founded in 1916, and was funded by a donation from George Eastman, founder of the Eastman Kodak Company. It was the first photography program at a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) in the country. The catalog lists photography as one of the available courses of study in the Department of Mechanical Industries. Within the category of the Industrial Arts, where photography fell, other courses included Printing, Mechanical Drawing, and Architectural Drawing.

Elise was one of two students taking the advanced course of study in photography with Battey. The other student who enrolled with Elise was Hugh H. Lee, a graduate of Lincoln University. Their arrival was noted by *The Tuskegee Student* as an example of the "growing appreciation on the part of the public" for the advanced courses in various trades at Tuskegee. *The Tuskegee Student* 31, no. 20-26 (17 Dec. 1921): 8. Tuskegee University Archives.

lantern slides, and know how to make enlargements; … He must do retouching, etching, printing, and do newspaper and commercial photography, etc. …"[161]

Despite the technical focus of the catalog, Tuskegee also had a diverse and extensive collection of art to inspire its students.[162] The university's buildings included displays of "everything from African art to Tanner's and Carver's painting and prints from New York and Boston galleries to classical busts."[163] Battey's artistic vision further complemented the technical training of the program. A biography published in the May 1927 issue of *Opportunity* connects Battey's photography to painting, and describes his work as a "struggle to liberate, through a rigid medium, the fluid graces of an artist's soul. For paint brush and palette, he used a lens and shutter."[164] Indeed, when Booker T. Washington first met Battey in New York, the photographer was the leading figure behind a group of African American artists in New York who called themselves the "Promoters of High Art," and who supported and encouraged black singers, poets, and visual artists in the city.[165] In his classes at Tuskegee, Battey encouraged his students to

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[161] The 1921 Tuskegee Course Catalog lists photography as one of the available courses of study in the Department of Mechanical Industries. Within the category of the Industrial Arts, where photography fell, other courses included Printing, Mechanical Drawing, and Architectural Drawing, see the description of occupations in the "Industrial Arts Group," 66-67. Tuskegee Archives.

[162] For illustrations of artists working at Tuskegee and a discussion of the role the arts played on campus, see Anne Kendrick Walker, *Tuskegee and the Black Belt: A Portrait of the Race* (Richmond, Va: The Dietz Press, 1944).

[163] Michael Bieze, *Booker T. Washington and the Art of Self Representation* (New York: Peter Lang Press, 2008), 136.

[164] *Opportunity* (May 1927), 126. Cited also in Deborah Willis, *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers 1840 to the Present* (New York: Norton, 2000), 39.

[165] Bieze, *Booker T. Washington*, 72.

learn the technical skills of photography, but he also likely encouraged them to consider themselves creative artists of a higher order.

Photographs of Battey's classroom show students learning to make portraits which reference traditional conventions of portrait painting. In one photograph, a young woman sits in front of a painted garden backdrop (Figure 35). Like many of Battey's subjects, she is well-dressed, and she appears to wait comfortably for other students to adjust the lighting and equipment before taking her photograph with a large-format camera that occupies a substantial portion of the image's composition. She might just as well be sitting in a painter's studio, waiting for the painter to adjust lighting or mix paints on his palette. In another photograph of the classroom, six students work at separate stations, retouching and editing photographs using the natural light of the large windows in the room (Figure 36). The same garden backdrop remains in the background, and the camera has been moved from the scene. These images indicate the way Battey trained his students to make photographic portraits which drew from the style of painted portraits of the late 19th century; they also demonstrate how far removed Battey's classroom was from the works being made simultaneously by photographers elsewhere. By the early 1920s, photographers were creating "cameraless images" (produced by manipulation of light and shadow directly on sensitized paper), exploring new possibilities in photocollage and photomontage, and experimenting with unusual angles, close-ups, and

abstraction.[166] To pose portrait subjects in front of painted landscapes was to make a determined look backward, to painting traditions of the 18th and 19th centuries.

When Elise returned from Alabama, she made lovely portraits at the Harleston Studio in the style of Battey's portraiture: she dimmed the glow of the lights, softening the textures of her sitters' clothing, hair, and skin. She used only a simple curtain backdrop, and she used the same cane or wicker chair in most of her images. In one portrait, Elise photographed a young woman sitting slightly turned to the side with her arm resting lightly on the chair (Figure 37). The photograph captures the luxurious materials of the woman's clothing. Her loose, draping chiffon sleeves seem gauzy and soft, even painterly. She has wrapped her watch around a lace handkerchief on her wrist. In her hands, she holds a rolled piece of paper, probably a diploma from high school or university, tied with a ribbon. In its composition and props, its emphasis upon the sitter's elegant clothing, and its documentation of a celebratory event, the photograph is quite different from Elise's portrait of Sue Bailey, and it is representative of much of Elise's professional portraiture in its style and subject matter.

Edwin studied at Atlanta University, and after graduation he worked for a year in the sociology department there. While there, he was deeply influenced by W. E. B. Du Bois, who encouraged his students to visit art museums and to study art history. In one lecture, Du Bois writes, "…whenever you go to Chicago, to New York, to Philadelphia, and Boston—go to the art galleries, not rushing through pell-mell, but go sit down and

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[166] Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography*, 3rd edition (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997), 647-648.

look at a beautiful picture a half hour each week. It is an education, soul training which nothing can surpass."[167] Inspired by Du Bois, who received his Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1895, Edwin applied to the art department at Harvard, and he was accepted in 1905. In Boston, Edwin lived with another Atlanta University alum, Jules Westmoreland. Together the two men started a postcard business, designing and selling cards bearing portraits of important African American historical figures. This was one of Edwin's first concerted efforts to disseminate images of successful African Americans—the men and women Du Bois had termed the "Talented Tenth." Representations of black businessmen, civil rights leaders, and college presidents would constitute the bulk of Edwin's painting practice throughout his life.

After a semester in Harvard's theory and history-based program, Edwin decided to attend the Boston School of the Museum of Fine Arts (SMFA) instead—the shift in emphasis suggests that he decided to pursue his dream of becoming a practicing artist, rather than a teacher.[168] At the SMFA, Edwin studied with Frank Benson and Edmund Tarbell, painters who were central to establishing the Boston School of painting at the turn of the 20th century. The Boston style was characterized by its use of impressionist color and compositions which referenced Old Masters.[169] Bostonians painted "dignified

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[167] W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Art and Art Galleries of Modern Europe," in *Against Racism: Unpublished Essays, Papers, Addresses 1887-1961,* ed. Herbert Aptheker (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1985). Du Bois originally gave this lecture at Wilberforce University in Ohio, where he taught from 1894-1896. He subsequently delivered it to a group in Augusta, Georgia.

[168] McDaniel, *Edwin Augustus Harleston*, 47.

[169] Trevor J. Fairbrother, "Painting in Boston, 1870-1930," *The Bostonians: Painters of An Elegant Age, 1870-1930* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1986), 64.

portraits, reposeful interiors, gracious still lifes, and cheerful, gentle landscapes" even as many of their peers in New York were turning to subjects of everyday life and the working classes.[170] While in art school, Edwin spent long hours in Boston and New York art museums, sketching works he loved.[171] Edwin would start on one part of the page and, finishing a sketch, would turn the book on its side and work on a new sketch in the remaining blank portion of the page, making series of overlapping drawings (Figure 38).[172] All of his sketches are of portraits, most of them painted by 19th century European artists.

While both Edwin and Elise looked to art historical conventions from the past to create their portraits, they also considered portraiture to be a potentially politicized genre in the present, part of a progressive effort to revise the way African Americans were depicted in the United States.[173] Portraiture, and especially photographic portraiture, was a mode used by both Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois to underpin major sociological and political projects at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1900, Du Bois organized 363 photographs into three albums, entitled *Types of American Negroes, Georgia, U.S.A.* (volumes 1-3), and *Negro Life in Georgia, U.S.A.* and included these

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[170] Ibid.

[171] Edwin attended the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston from 1906 to 1913.

[172] Edwin's choice of artists to sketch demonstrates a bias toward French and Spanish academic painters. He sketched portraits by Antonio Fabrés y Costa, Alexandre Louis Leloir, Daniel Vierge, Michel Francois Dandré-Bardon, and Henry Francois Farny.

[173] This impulse connects with historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's discussion of the long civil rights movement in her article, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," which has revitalized studies of the politics of this period. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233-1263.

albums as part of the American Negro Exhibit in the Paris Exposition of that year.[174] Many of the photographs were portraits. The same year, Washington published *A New Negro for a New Century*.[175] In it, he included 60 portraits of important black educators, businesspeople, and club women, with short captions noting their names and occupations. These exhibitions and books used portraits to build new, publicly accessible collections of images of middle and upper class African Americans: these portraits represented examples of black success.

Edwin returned from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in 1912, and he found that Charleston was no longer the elegant and romantic city it had been in the past. Between 1911 and 1919, the city went through a period of unrest and decrepitude. The South Carolina Railroad had recently gone bankrupt, and the region's phosphate industry had collapsed. In 1911, the city was pummeled by a hurricane that wiped out much of the town and devastated the rice farms of the Low Country, striking

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[174] For a study of Du Bois's uses of photography and the way his ideas about the American "color line" overlap with the visualization of race at the turn of the 20th century, see Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

[175] The book includes an essay about black soldiers in the Spanish-American War, an extensive history "of the upward struggles of the Negro Race," an essay on Reconstruction and its industrial effects (by historian N. B. Wood), and an essay by Fannie Barrier Williams about black women's clubs and their role in "race regeneration." Booker T. Washington with N.B. Wood and Fannie Barrier Williams, *A New Negro for a New Century*. 1900. Reprinted by The New York Times, 1969. In this book, Washington outlines his arguments for industrial education, linking its importance to a rapidly modernizing U.S.: "The educational work in the Southern States is accomplishing wonders in the moral and intellectual uplift of the people, which has already been felt in the life of the South, and must be felt in larger measure in the years to come. There has been a marked tendency of late years to make the education conform more to the industrial lines laid by General Armstrong. This is a healthy sign, as the more practical education is the better, especially as the tendency of modern industrialism is more and more towards specialization in all departments of learning and activity of whatever sort; and this is said without intending in the least to depreciate or underrate what is regarded as the higher education. All education is good, but assuredly that is the best which enables a man to fit in most readily with the conditions of life in which he finds himself." Ibid., 92.

the final blow to the agricultural system which had been in place for hundreds of years.[176] The formerly tourist-friendly Southern city was now seen as "a stinking, rotting, unhealthy, poverty-stricken, ill governed town, better known for its vices than its culture."[177] The city may have been on the cusp of what would later be termed the Charleston Renaissance but when Edwin returned, the primary artistic activity seemed to be erecting monuments to the Confederacy.[178] Further, the city was increasingly segregated, a dramatic shift from the relative freedom Edwin had enjoyed in Boston. The bleak setting provided the backdrop for a period of political awakening for Edwin; his work of the 19-teens reflects his growing involvement in local issues as both an artist and an activist, and his politics are reflected in the few portraits he made during this period. The end of World War I further precipitated Edwin's political work. Many African American leaders in the late 19-teens linked military service and sacrifice with black masculinity, national pride, and community leadership. As historian Adriane Lentz-Smith writes, "Their experiences in France altered how these soldiers saw themselves as citizens, workers, heroes, and lovers and transformed how they interpolated those

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[176] M. Akua McDaniel, "Edwin Augustus Harleston: Envisioning the Talented Tenth," in Potts-Campbell, *Edwin Augustus Harleston: Artist and Activist in a Changing Era* (Charleston: Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, 2006), 17-18.

[177] John Joseph Duffy, "Charleston Politics in the Progressive Era" (PhD dissertation, The University of South Carolina, 1963), 31. Also cited in McDaniel, "Envisioning the Talented Tenth," 18.

[178] For a survey of Confederate monuments erected in the South during the early 20th century and the role women's organizations played in their creation, see *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory*, ed. Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003).

identities into their worldview."[179] When black soldiers returned from service, they were faced with continued segregation, disfranchisement, and racially-motivated violence. Like many African American men of his generation, Edwin was prompted to politics partly because of the gaping disparity he witnessed between evidence of black military heroism and the realities of a nation which sanctioned racism.[180]

In 1918, Edwin wrote, directed, and acted in a short play called *The War Cross*. Set in Beaufort, South Carolina, the play centers on a character named Philip Harris who is drafted into the army. In the play, Harris loses an arm during the war, and he returns as a decorated war hero. The play valorizes Harris's service to his community and his country, even as he returns crippled and is then abandoned by his fiancée. An undated painting entitled *The Sergeant* offers another (likely contemporaneous) depiction of a heroic black soldier. In it Edwin depicts a young African American military recruit, who looks out at the viewer, arms folded confidently across his chest (Figure 39).[181] The soldier faces the viewer in a three-quarter view, his eyes looking straight out of the canvas. His direct gaze places an image of a black man in a visual relationship with the viewer that he might not have been able to maintain in the segregated South, where the initiation of confident eye contact could be punished by death. The painting is not

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[179]Adriane Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 7.

[180] Although Edwin did not serve in the military, he was contacted by Du Bois to aid in the construction of a military training camp in Iowa for black recruits. His brother did serve abroad.

[181] Date of *The Sergeant* unknown; the painting was also shown with the title *The Negro Soldier*. A snapshot taken by Elise of a soldier walking down a street, his weapon over his shoulder and a metal helmet on his head may have been a source for *The Sergeant* and *The Gas Attack*.

particularly notable in its execution or for innovations within Edwin's broader body of work, though it did elicit strong emotional responses from viewers when it was shown at community centers and to civic groups. For example, when Edwin showed the painting at a meeting of the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women's Clubs in Orangeburg, S.C. in 1922, Mrs. Marion Birnie Wilkinson, president of the club, subsequently wrote:

> So thoroughly aroused were the women, that when your picture of the Negro Soldier was shown, they rose to their feet, as one, with bowed heads and tear filled eyes. … Let me thank you again and again for your wonderful Art and the inspiration that it has given to all of us. Small town people do not have the opportunity to see these things and our women went home uplifted in spirit and with new courage in their heart.[182]

In her letter, Wilkinson notes the rarity of seeing such images in the rural South. The effect of seeing a portrait of a proud black soldier, she tells Edwin, caused its viewers to feel newly courageous: the viewers' feelings upon seeing the painting confirm the image's political potency.

In 1918, Edwin also co-founded Charleston's branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), becoming its first president. As president, Edwin campaigned for jobs for black teachers, encouraged the local judicial system to try cases involving violence against African Americans, and was the voice of the organization to the media. In a letter to John Shillady, secretary of the NAACP, dated May 23, 1918, Edwin noted the successes of the membership drive in Charleston, and he described the organization's work on specific trials:

> The Branch is now busy working on a certain phase of a criminal case growing out of a recent murder by a white man of a highly respected Negro mechanic of

[182] Letter from Mrs. Marion Birnie Wilkinson to Edwin Harleston, 9 May 1922. Collection of Mae Gentry.

> our town. We are trying to make sure of a trial by jury, a commonplace not often carried out in similar cases in Charleston, the unwarranted finding of [the] juries seeming to permit that requirement of the law to be omitted.[183]

In a letter dated November 2 of that year, Harleston updated Shillady on the branch's continued work. The organization assisted in the prosecution of five court cases that summer. In the murder case he mentioned in his earlier letter, the jury rendered a verdict of "not guilty." Edwin wrote, "We hardly expected a conviction—such things are unknown in these parts—but we feel that it was a good thing to have the murderer tried. It is the first time in at least twenty years that a white man in Charleston County has been tried by a jury for the murder of a Negro."[184]

In his November letter, Edwin also outlined his next project: "to try to have colored teachers employed in the colored public schools, Charleston being in the anomalous position of having Southern white teachers in the colored schools."[185] Combining this campaign with the organization's membership drive, Edwin and his committees held public meetings in twelve of the city's largest churches. They gained more than a thousand members, and more than five thousand people signed the petition to the Legislature to change Charleston's teaching policy. The campaign convinced the state legislators to remove white teachers from black schools, and to replace them with black

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[183] Letter from Edwin A. Harleston to Mr. John A. Shillady, 23 May 1918. Collections of the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

[184] Letter from Edwin A. Harleston to John R. Shillady, November 2, 1918. Collection of Mae Gentry.

[185] Ibid.

teachers.[186] Edwin concluded his letter to Shillady on a triumphant note: "… in this hotbed of entrenched prejudice much remains to be done, but the officers and the Executive Committee have let it be known from the outset that they will not tire and that they are not afraid to work along the lines for which the NAACP was organized."[187]

In April of 1919, Edwin wrote a letter to the editor of the local newspaper, describing an incident in which Charlestonians were invited to welcome and view the transport ship *Mercury*, which had recently carried American soldiers back from France. Of the people who visited the ship, only whites were allowed inside. "I am writing to ask you the simple favor, in future announcements of such invitations as the above mentioned one, to state when possible whether it is the 'public' that is invited or 'whites only,' and thus save our colored men and especially our colored women the needless humiliation which such things cause," he wrote. Underneath the request, Edwin included a gentle threat to white businesses, including the newspaper: "Perhaps I do not need to tell you, Mr. Editor, that we know how to stay away."[188]

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[186] The success of the NAACP's teaching campaign in Charleston drew attention from W. E. B. Du Bois, who wrote asking Edwin to write an article for *The Crisis* describing "the full story of your fight for colored teachers and its final outcome," with corresponding photographs of schools and teachers in Charleston. In June of 1921, *The Crisis* ran an article describing the hiring of black teachers in Charleston schools. The story was accompanied by a photograph of the Charleston committee: Edwin Harleston, Rev. C. C. Jacobs, Dr. W. H. Johnson, Hon. Thomas E. Miller, and Dr. J. M. Thompson. "Colored Teachers in Charleston Schools," *The Crisis* 22, no. 2 (June 1921): 58-60. For more about the Charleston teaching campaign, see also Janet G. Hudson, *Entangled by White Supremacy: Reform in World War I-era South Carolina* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009).

[187] Letter from Edwin A. Harleston to John R. Shillady, November 2, 1918. Collection of Mae Gentry.

[188] "Letter to the Editor," *The Charleston News and Courier*, April 15, 1919.

The city's post-war racial tensions continued to build and, on May 10, 1919, the city erupted in a riot. The *New York Times* would report the next day that "the trouble" had "grown out of the shooting of a sailor by a negro in a downtown pool room."[189] White sailors attacked black civilians, raided local gun shops, and overpowered police; at least six people died. In the days after the riot, as the sailors were confined to their quarters and Charlestonians cleared the wreckage, a committee of black ministers and laymen including Harleston sent a manifesto, dated May 16, to the Charleston *News and Courier*, demanding

> That the pulpit and press use their influence to discourage the mob spirit and race antipathy, and to advocate praiseworthy endeavors for all people.
> That social justice and a square deal be given to all people.
> That the housing, lighting, sanitary and educational conditions of the negroes of this city be improved.[190]

During the late 19-teens, the portraits Edwin painted were of local individuals involved in the political campaigns of the NAACP. In 1919, Edwin painted a portrait of Thomas Miller, a lawyer, politician, and educator who served in the state legislature and in Congress. Miller worked closely with Edwin on the teacher petition, and he spoke on behalf of the NAACP to argue for the petition at the state legislature. In the portrait, Edwin paints him seated and from the waist up. He appears to look out at the viewer defiantly. One art historian compares Miller's image to the stereotype of the white

[189] "Report Six Killed in Sailor-Negro Riot," *The New York Times*, May 11, 1919.

[190] "Negroes Deplore the Mob Spirit," *The Charleston News and Courier*, May 18, 1919, 1H.

plantation owner: "portly, white-bearded, and arrogant."[191] Miller's liminal racial identity—the son of a white man and black woman, he persistently defined himself as black—allowed Edwin to subvert the stereotype, replacing the typical plantation owner with a major political figure in the fight for civil rights.

Edwin's campaign to find jobs for black teachers in Charleston's black schools was likely done with Elise in mind, as she had been forced to leave Charleston for a string of rural teaching jobs after receiving her teaching diploma. Her letters to Edwin throughout their courtship and marriage seem to indicate that Elise shared many of his political views, although there is no record of her role in local politics. For her part, Elise became a leader in local civic activities. She was an influential alumna of the Avery Normal Institute, and she was involved in planning many of the school's fundraisers and cultural activities. Elise's politics were not of the petition-writing kind; instead, she was involved in developing and supporting opportunities and events which highlighted black culture. A trace of how she thought about the politics behind her images, however, can be found in several studio portraits she made of elderly individuals. Elise took a series of undated photographs of a woman whose thick white hair is pulled back and who clasps a cane. The woman wears a plain skirt and a stiff shawl that she has wrapped over her shoulders and pinned to stay in place. In one image, she sits in a wooden chair which appears in many of Elise's portraits (Figure 40). In this composition, Elise cropped the image tightly around the woman's upper body. The woman looks out towards the

[191] Susan V. Donaldson, "Edwin A. Harleston and Charleston's Racial Politics of Preservation," in *Edwin Augustus Harleston: Artist and Activist in a Changing Era*, ed. Leila Potts-Campbell (Charleston: Avery Research Center, 2006), 38.

photographer and slightly down, and we see that the skin around her mouth is somewhat sunken, perhaps from the loss of her lower teeth. Her expression is difficult to interpret. The woman is posed at an angle that places her hand in the foreground of the image. The veins in her hand and the strong contrast created by light reflecting off her dark skin draw our eyes there, to her fist.

At Tuskegee, Prentice Polk made many similar images of local men and women during his time as a student of Cornelius Marion Battey, and later as head of photography at Tuskegee, a position he maintained for more than 45 years. Polk's portraits, like Elise's, heroicized their working class subjects by presenting them in proud, upright stances, looking directly out of the frame. In his photograph *The Boss*, for example, a woman stands with her hands on her hips, and she looks directly at the photographer (Figure 41). Elise, like Polk before her, found romance in the details of her subject's simple clothing. The portraits have been called rural "types" by photo historians, but the type in Elise's photograph of the old woman is difficult to define. Edwin subsequently used Elise's series of photographs of this woman as the basis for his painting *The Old Servant,* and perhaps the type is of a local maid or cleaning woman. Or perhaps she was supposed to be an "old woman" type. The woman's age, however, would very likely indicate that she had survived the Civil War, perhaps that she had been enslaved and emancipated. "Servant," then, is an indicator of hard work and class status, but it also becomes an indicator of freedom. Her strong fist and direct gaze indicate a tough resilience and survivor's strength. Another of Elise's portraits takes a Civil War veteran as its subject. In this image, Elise photographed an elderly man wearing a uniform and

gazing directly toward the camera. On the man's uniform are medals indicating his membership in a Union Army veteran's group. Here the type "veteran" is complemented by his enlistment in the Union Army rather than the Confederate Army. As in the photograph of the woman described above, the Civil War resonates quietly in the portraits. In this photograph, Elise documents a figure that would be seen as heroic within the local black community while she works within the conventions of making a military portrait.

PORTRAITS OF SELF AND OTHER

One of the challenges Edwin found during his training in Boston was that none of his teachers had studied how to paint brown skin, and all of the models in his painting classes were white. During his six years at the SMFA, Edwin worked independently to develop strategies for painting brown, black, and tan skin tones, often using himself as a model. In his *Self-Portrait in Profile,* ca. 1912, he painted himself in a black jacket with a starched white collar (Figure 42). Seen in profile, his face seems to have an uneven texture, with patches of light and dark browns clumsily blocking in the contours of his facial structure. His eyes are dark and hooded with shadows that reinforce his serious expression: his lips are sealed, and turn down into a slight frown. Combined with his erect posture and the simple, dark green background, the portrait is a formal study in color. His stiff collar is painted a bright white, which breaks up the painting's murky palette and adds some light to the canvas. Another self portrait made in 1916 shows a more refined use of color (Figure 43). Here Edwin paints himself from the chest up, turned at a slight angle, and facing the viewer. The background is done in light red, orange, and yellow tones, which complement the warm yellow and tan shades of his face. He appears to be illuminated by a strong light source above his head and to one side; the highlight it produces is centered on his forehead. He wears a white shirt and black bow tie, and this outfit choice makes it clear that the painting is of Edwin as artist in his studio. In both of these self portraits, we see Edwin determining his own self-representation as an artist and a professional. With this portrait, Edwin also connected to

a history of artist self-portraiture; like countless artists before him, Edwin was closely studying himself and his profession, and he was exploring what it meant to represent himself (in his life and in his paintings) as an artist.[192]

While he was at the SMFA, Edwin also modeled for other students. Around 1910, a portrait of Edwin titled "The Sailor" painted by an SMFA student named Philip Adams was shown at the Copley Gallery in Boston. The way Adams portrays Edwin is quite different from the way Edwin paints himself in his self portraits. F. W. Coburn, a reviewer for the *Boston Post,* called the portrait "rather remarkable," and discussed at length the artist's depiction of Edwin's skin color and physiognomy:

> [Adams] has made a most compelling likeness of a swart [*sic*] youth of pronounced features and wearing a sailor's jacket loosely open in the front. The vividness with which the artist has projected and fixated this personality is due in large part to his imaginative grasp of the value of the cranial characters in a study of this kind. … This portrait is a revelation of intelligence and vigor shining through the screen of the flesh and, with its careful selection of color tones, it is a decorative achievement as well.[193]

Although the painting is now lost or in a private collection, the Harleston archives include a black and white photograph of Edwin seated next to the painting, wearing his "sailor's jacket," a dark shirt, open wide at the collar (Figure 44). Adams's depiction of Edwin as a sailor is different from Edwin's self portraits primarily because of the two indicators of his "sailor" profession—the open shirt and the painting's title. In Adams's

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[192] A useful study about the psychology behind the making (and interpreting) of self-portraits at various historical moments is W. Ray Crozier and Paul Greenhalgh, "Self-Portraits as Presentations of Self" *Leonardo* 21, no. 1 (1988): 29-33.

[193] Coburn's article is part of the Mae Gentry archival collection. It is undated and without the title of the newspaper or the page number. Following Edward Ball's lead, I date the article to ca. 1910 and believe that it was published in the *Boston Post*. Attached to the article is a photograph of Edwin posing by the finished portrait. Collection of Mae Gentry.

painting, we see Edwin as a type, a profession, a class of person, and a race; historically, portraiture has been used to indicate a subject's work (and not the subtleties of modern subjectivity and personhood). Edwin's self portraits also do this: "Here I am, as an artist," he seems to say in them. If we understand a portrait to be an exchange between artist and sitter, we see in these examples how Edwin was, to himself, always and foremost an artist, even as he could simultaneously stand in as a sailor type for Adams.[194] The comparison also indicates Edwin's ability to move between (and to be cast within) different class and race categories.

Another depiction of Edwin was written in the late 1920s by author DuBose Heyward, who was a prominent member of the Charleston Renaissance. The works of Charleston Renaissance artists and writers repeatedly rehashed stereotypes of antebellum Southern blacks to construct images of contemporary black communities: these white authors and artists looked to the myths of the past to conjure an image of a modern South. Charleston historians Harlan Greene and James Hutchisson describe the local Renaissance as part of a temporal project: "This was the paradox of the South and of the Charleston Renaissance: a people and an era caught between the hazy golden look back to glory and the incandescent glow of neon and tomorrow."[195] A cadre of well-connected white women, including the painters Anna Heyward Taylor, Elizabeth O'Neill Verner,

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[194] Adams's depiction of Edwin as a sailor has an interesting element of truth to it. Edwin's father was a ship captain and the family referred to him as "Captain," throughout his life. Further, during Edwin's time in Boston, he spent at least one summer working on a steamship.

[195] Harlan Greene and James M. Hutchisson, eds. "Introduction: The Charleston Renaissance Considered," in *Renaissance in Charleston: Art and Life in the Carolina Low Country, 1900-1940* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2003), 8-9.

and Alice Ravenel Huger Smith, dominated Charleston's art world and its art museum (which was closed to black visitors).[196] Many of these women were self-taught painters who used the local landscape and romantic Charleston genre scenes as their subject matter. Exactly contemporaneously with Edwin's work with the NAACP and the 1919 race riot in Charleston, this group of white women artists fostered the new tourism industry in Charleston, capitalizing on the city's antebellum homes and Civil War history in a blatant effort to eliminate the local black community's increasing challenges to white hegemony in the city.[197] In their paintings, these women depicted generic scenes of local African Americans at work on rice plantations, selling flowers in downtown Charleston, or attending church. Authors, including Heyward, who were part of the Charleston Renaissance received national attention for their depiction of supposedly authentic Southern, working-class, black characters. Julia Peterkin's Pulitzer prize-winning novel

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[196] The best resource on the white women painting in Charleston during the Charleston Renaissance is Stephanie E. Yuhl's book *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005) based upon her dissertation, *High Culture in the Low Country: Arts, Identity and Tourism in Charleston, South Carolina, 1920-1940* (Duke University, 1998). Yuhl considers the ways in which their paintings and prints overlapped with their work to establish Charleston as a tourist destination.

Work by these artists appears in several exhibitions and exhibition catalogues by Martha Severens, former curator at the Gibbes Museum of Art in Charleston and the Greenville Country Museum of Art in Greenville, South Carolina. Severens and Yuhl also have essays about these artists included in *Renaissance in Charleston: Art and Life in the Carolina Low Country, 1900-1940.* Alice Ravenel Huger Smith also published her own texts about Charleston and collaborated on others, including *The Dwelling Houses of Charleston South Carolina* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1917), *Adventures in Green Places* by Herbert Ravenel Sass (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), and *A Charleston Sketchbook* (Charleston: Carolina Art Association, 1940). Elizabeth O'Neill Verner published *Mellowed by Time: A Charleston Notebook* (Columbia, S.C.: Bostick & Thornley, Inc., 1953), a collection of her reminiscences about Charleston, illustrated by her pencil drawings of the town.

[197] Stephanie Yuhl's book *A Golden Haze of Memory* outlines the racial politics behind Charleston's emergence as a tourist destination in the early 20th century. Also see Susan V. Donaldson, "Charleston's Racial Politics of Historic Preservation: The Case of Edwin A. Harleston," in Greene and Hutchisson, *Renaissance in Charleston*, 176-198.

Scarlet Sister Mary (1928) and Heyward's novel *Porgy* (1925), for example, both revolved around black characters who speak in a thick Gullah dialect. *Porgy* tells an ill-fated love story revolving around a crippled beggar living in the rundown Catfish Row tenement. After the publication of *Porgy,* Alain Locke wrote to Heyward from New York and encouraged him to work with a black collaborator on his future projects. Locke's request presumes that a black collaborator would offer insights into the portrayal of black characters. Heyward responded with a letter in defense of his own understanding of black dialect and the "psychology" of the African American community he described:

> I wonder whether you are right about the real value of working with a Negro collaborator. I have been quite awake to my own short-comings, and I have been aware of my audacity in attempting the psychology of a different race. I am pretty well convinced, however, that the intellectual Negro, who has never lived among the Southern primatives [sic] of his own race, knows less about them than a white who has given them close and sympathetic study for years. For instance, Countee Cullen, while giving me a most flattering review of PORGY, admitted that he was unable to speak about the dialect. It sounded illogical to him, but he could not say. On the other hand, one of the Charleston Negroes would be too self-conscious to be of any use.[198]

In his 1929 novel *Mamba's Daughters: A Novel of Charleston*, Heyward bases a character named Frank North on Edwin.[199] Heyward describes North as an educated

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[198] Letter from DuBose Heyward to Alain Locke, dated Sept. 14, 1926. Collection of Mae Gentry.

[199] DuBose Heyward, *Mamba's Daughters: A Novel of Charleston* (New York: The Literary Guild, 1929). The connection between Frank North and Edwin Harleston is repeatedly mentioned in the literature about Harleston; M. Akua McDaniel makes this connection, as does Edwina Harleston Whitlock. The characterization of North as a graduate of Avery Normal Institute, an academically trained painter who studied in the north, and a local portrait painter supported by his father, is clearly based upon Edwin's biography, which was familiar to members of the Charleston Renaissance. For evidence that the Charleston Renaissance artists knew about Edwin's training and career, see letter from Elise to Edwin remarking upon a visit from Julia Peterkin (dated September 23, 1930) and another noting that Edwin's father had been questioned by John Bennett, a prominent member of the Charleston Renaissance movement, about his son's paintings (dated October 28, 1925). SCHS Archives.

elitist, ashamed of the spirituals of "ignorant negroes," and trained in academic painting styles in New York. The character describes his life modestly: "'Oh, there isn't much to tell,'" he says. "'Graduated from Avery here in town and Dad gave me two years in an art school in New York. Now I am going in for portraiture. I want to paint my own people, and they are good about sitting for me.'"[200] Heyward's novel suggests, however, that North distances himself from his "own people" with his elitist biases. In the novel, North and a woman named Lissa hear spirituals emanating from a church revival as they walk home from a party:

> The rhythm beat in waves against the soft spring night—the air was heady with the faint, indefinable, yet intoxicating odour of untamed bodies rocking in a close mass, one with the song that they were creating.
>
> North's voice, held on a deliberately casual note, cut across the music. "Oh, that's all right for these ignorant negroes, I suppose, but where'd we be if we stopped at that? We've got to go beyond it. We've [sic] living in a civilised community."

Lissa protests, though, urging him to go in and, for a second, he relaxes his grip on her arm and seems to think about it. Then, "Suddenly he pulled back sharply. 'No,' he said sternly. 'It won't do—we've got to get away from here. I must get you home. This isn't our sort of crowd, and we must stand for something, you know. …'"[201] Here Heyward emphasizes the artist's discomfort with spirituals because of their connection to the working class: he describes Edwin as far removed from black working class experience, uncomfortable with local colloquial traditions. This discomfort is one that W. E. B. DuBois describes in his essay "The Coming of John," published in *The Souls of Black*

[200] Ibid., 216-218.

[201] Ibid., 218.

Folk in 1903.[202] The essay describes two young men from the same town, both named John. One is white, the other black. Both go away to college, and when they return to their small town, both are frustrated in their attempts to relate to their communities. White John's education has left him with a sense of entitlement and a feeling of superiority to his hometown. For black John, education has burdened him with a sadness and realization of the absence of opportunities for his community. The experience of returning home mystifies him:

> What on earth had come over him? Every step he made offended some one. … And all the time he had meant right,--and yet, and yet, somehow he found it so hard and strange to fit his old surroundings again, to find his place in the world about him. He could not remember that he used to have any difficulty in the past, when life was glad and gay.[203]

Du Bois terms this feeling of displacement "the contradiction of double aims."[204] Du Bois also describes an unbreachable distance between the white and black communities in the same town: "And neither world thought the other world's thought, save with a vague unrest."[205] In Heyward's novel, Edwin is portrayed by another (an *other*) artist, and also in relation to ideas of the "other," which here take the form of black spirituals, a cultural form Heyward believed to be an authentic expression of black experience. Heyward's depiction of North—the name even indicates the character's outsiderness to Southern

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[202] DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; repr., New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 219-239.

[203] Ibid., 232-233.

[204] Ibid., 8.

[205] Ibid., 222.

black identity—is of a character who, though his education and ideas about culture, has become an outsider to his own community.

AFRICA AND *THE NEW NEGRO*

Edwin's title for his portrait of Sue Bailey—*Portrait of Miss Sue Bailey with the African Shawl*—makes direct reference to an African origin-point. This reference, in 1930, would clearly indicate some relationship to the rhetoric of the New Negro outlined by Alain Locke in 1925. In his collection of essays, poetry, and cultural musings entitled *The New Negro,* Locke uses the term to describe a new cultural figure—artist, writer, or musician—from Harlem.[206] This figure, according to Locke, tapped into a youthful, modern, and authentically black art, premised upon an African aesthetic. Edwin's portrait of Bailey marks his break with the convention of portrait as an indicator of one's profession. Instead, he depicts Bailey as a specific individual who was representative of a larger community; he does so by wrapping the individual (Sue Bailey) in a symbol of the community (the African shawl). Here Edwin tries to reconcile two different approaches to black representation: that of the mode of black portraiture championed by W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington and that of the New Negro community and its African-based aesthetic (described by Locke and epitomized by the work of Aaron Douglas).

The philosophies and art practices of the New Negro movement were defined by the idea of shared African American culture, community, and a common history. In "The Negro's Contribution to American Art and Literature," Locke describes a "collective

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[206] Alain Locke, *The New Negro*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997. Originally published in 1925 by Albert & Charles Boni. Locke's "New Negro" exists in sharp contrast with Booker T. Washington's use of the term to describe his ideal African American citizen trained in the industrial arts to meet the challenges of a modernizing America.

experience" felt by African Americans who shared the "group feelings, group reactions, [and] group traditions" of black artists in Harlem.[207] The young artists of Harlem, he writes, "plunge more naturally into the core substance of Negro life and experience and catch its characteristic idioms more deftly."[208]

Locke's description of the New Negro did not include artists, like Edwin, who were academically trained and working in conventional genres of painting. In fact, Locke specifically characterizes Edwin's work (as well as the work of W.E. Scott, W. Braxton, W. Farrow, Laura Wheeler, Meta Warrick Fuller, and May Howard Jackson) as "handicapped," "imitative," and "not highly original" and describes these artists as "wandering amateurs in the very field that might have given them concerted mastery." [209] He dismisses their academic training and painting genres as outdated and passé. "We ought and must have a school of Negro art, a local and a racially representative tradition," Locke writes.[210] The divide between Edwin's work and Locke's writings about the New Negro was partially one of training: Edwin had trained in a genre of painting that emphasized the individual, and Locke encouraged artists to find the "collective" and "authentic" black spirit in the artistic styles of African art and the shared experiences of black community.

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[207] Alain Locke, "The Negro's Contribution to American Art and Literature," in *The Critical Temper of Alain Locke*, ed. Jeffrey C. Stewart (New York: Garland Publishing, 1983), 439-450.

[208] Ibid.

[209] Alain Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," in *The New Negro* (1925; repr., New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 266.

[210] Ibid.

The aesthetic Locke describes can be seen as it developed on the cover art of *Opportunity* magazine during the 1920s.[211] Like *The Crisis*, produced by the NAACP and edited by W. E. B. Du Bois, *Opportunity* published new visual and literary interpretations of black life, to counter stereotypical images of blacks promulgated by popular culture at the time.[212] Between 1923 and 1928, *Opportunity* devoted considerable space to a

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[211] *Opportunity* magazine was a major source of support for artists, writers, painters, and sculptors of Harlem's New Negro movement. The magazine was begun in 1923 by the National Urban League, a civil rights organization headquartered in New York. The term "New Negro" precedes its use, most notably by Alain Locke, during the period subsequently re-named the Harlem Renaissance (ca. 1919-1934). In 1900, Booker T. Washington wrote a book titled *A New Negro for a New Century* and in 1919, Hubert Harrison (d. 1927) edited the *New Negro* magazine. In 1924, the magazine *Vanity Fair* published an article entitled "Enter the New Negro, a Distinctive Type Recently Created by the Coloured Cabaret Belt in New York," anchoring the figure of the "New Negro" definitively in New York. In 1925, Alain Locke (1885-1954) published his influential study of the arts and literature emerging out of Harlem titled *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. Some scholars separate the "New Negro" movement from the Harlem Renaissance, using the former to discuss African American political activism in New York during the 1920s and the latter to designate the cultural movement. For the purposes of this dissertation, I use the terms "New Negro movement" and "Harlem Renaissance" interchangeably to signify the artistic and literary renaissance which happened in New York between 1919 and 1934; I see this artistic movement as inextricably tied to the political climate of the "New Negro" movement. For additional studies of the movement, see: Eugene C. Holmes, "Alain Locke and the New Negro Movement," *Negro American Literature Forum* 2, no. 3 (Fall 1968): 60-68; Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925); Richard A. Long, "The Genesis of Locke's *The New Negro,*" *Black World* 25, no. 4 (1976): 14-20; Martha Jane Nadell, *Enter the New Negroes: Images of Race in American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); and Sally J. Scholz, "Individual and Community: Artistic Representation in Alain L. Locke's Politics," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 491-502.

Opportunity's editor, Charles S. Johnson, initiated a series of literary contests which provided inspiration, financial support, and a national audience for many of the emerging black writers of the period. The magazine also provided a forum for artists to show their work and it hired writers to contribute articles and criticism about the arts in every issue. See Roseann Pope Bell, "The Crisis and Opportunity Magazines: Reflections of A Black Culture, 1920-1930" (PhD dissertation, Emory University, 1974). It is worth noting that although at the beginning of 1927, Carl Van Vechten argued that *Opportunity* magazine could be favorably compared to any magazine in the United States, at its peak circulation period in 1928, the magazine sold 11,000 copies per month and 40 percent of these were to whites. For an expansive history of both magazines, see David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997). *Opportunity's* emphasis upon the literary and creative arts would change with Johnson's resignation in the Fall of 1928. That year, he left to the magazine to be the chair of the Sociology Department at Fisk University. Subsequently, the magazine became "a social work journal," according to Roseann Pope Bell, 5. The literary competitions were put on hiatus by Johnson in September 1927 and were never resumed.

[212] A number of texts outline the history of demeaning images of African Americans circulated in American popular culture. See especially, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Face and Voice of Blackness," in

discussion of African American artists.[213] In the early 1920s, *Opportunity*'s writers discussed the works of black artists in terms of racial uplift and academic tradition, frequently connecting them to Henry Ossawa Tanner, who served as the example of the most successful and talented African American academic painter of the 19th and 20th centuries.[214] In January 1924, *Opportunity* featured Edwin's painting *The Bible Student* on its cover (Figure 45). The painting depicts an elderly African American man poring over a large Bible, which he has propped on his lap. It is a scene of work: the man studies intently. Like Tanner's 1894 painting *The Thankful Poor*, the individual in Edwin's *The*

Facing History: The Black Image in American Art, 1710-1940 (Washington, D.C.: The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1990), xxix-xlvi.

213 In January 1923, an article entitled "Our Young Negro Artists" included images of works by art students Otto Farrill, Charles Keene, John H. Urquhart, W. Russell, and Samuel Ellis Blount. The June 1923 issue included an article entitled "Our Young Artists," in which the author discusses etchings by Albert A. Smith of famous historical figures such as Samuel Coleridge Taylor, Frederick Douglass, Harriett Tubman, Booker T. Washington, Phyllis Wheatley, and Toussaint L'Overture. The magazine also reported on discrimination against African American artists. The June 1923 issue includes an article by Cleveland G. Allen about sculptress Augusta Savage, who was denied admission to the Fontainebleau School of Fine Arts in France as a result of an appeal by a committee of whites in the United States who "believe[d] that she would not be acceptable to the white American students of the school." Allen reports on the series of appeals to the French government being made on Savage's behalf. "France has already learned something of the artistic ability of the American Negro through the famous paintings of Henry O. Tanner, accepted at the Louvre and other famous art galleries," Allen adds. Cleveland G. Allen, "Our Young Artists," *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* (June 1923): 24-25.

214 In July 1923, *Opportunity* featured a profile of Tanner. On the cover, the magazine reproduced a crayon drawing of Tanner by Francis Holbrook. The drawing depicts a dapper, cosmopolitan Tanner in suit and tie, wearing wire-rimmed glasses and a goatee. The cover image accompanies an article by Holbrook, entitled "A Group of Negro Artists," in which she wrote brief biographies of artists Edward M. Bannister, Meta Warrick Fuller, William Edouard Scott, William A. Harper, Richard Lonsdale Brown, Edmonia Lewis, May Howard Jackson, Laura Wheeler, Louise Latimer, W.M. Farrow, H.O. Lewis, Allan Randall Freelan, Charles Osborne, Augusta Savage, Alfred Smith, and Elmer S. Campbell. "The few recognized artists, sculptors and illustrators of whom this race can boast in this country, gained prominence after years of the most trying circumstances, and it is to them that the younger artists and students must look for inspiration," Holbrook writes. Francis C. Holbrooke, "A Group of Negro Artists," *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 1, no. 7 (July 1923): 211-213.

Bible Student is depicted as a working-class person who seems to turn to religion to find spiritual nourishment, despite (or in response to) difficult circumstances (Figure 46).

Inside the January 1924 issue, arts writer Madeline Allison wrote a short article entitled "Harleston! Who is E.A. Harleston?"[215] She describes her experience of seeing several of Edwin's portraits at an exhibit at the 135th Street Library (now the Schomburg Center) in New York.[216] Allison writes, "For the past eleven years Mr. Harleston has devoted his talents to the study of colored people. To paint them not in caricature, but with the classic technique and an *exact portrayal* of features and color, through shadow effects and a blending of colors; to make compositions in industry, religion, and social contact is the ambition of his life."[217] Edwin's attempt at "exact portrayal" of his subjects aligned with *Opportunity*'s early attempts to represent the black subject as an industrious, patient, and (often) religious type.

Exactly a year after Harleston's *Bible Student* appeared on its cover, *Opportunity* published a cover image by German artist Winold Reiss (1886-1953) (Figure 47). Reiss, who was Aaron Douglas's teacher, drew bold abstract designs based on African masks. His design for *Opportunity* signaled an abrupt change in the black aesthetic headquartered in Harlem, a move to represent community through abstracted figures and

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[215] Madeline Allison, "Harleston! Who is E.A. Harleston?" *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 2, no. 13 (January 1924): 21-22. Allison was a writer and editor for *The Crisis* magazine from 1911 to 1923 and subsequently worked as a writer for *Opportunity* magazine.

[216] For a history of the Schomburg Center, see Sarah A. Anderson, "'The Place to Go': The 135th Street Branch Library and the Harlem Renaissance," *The Library Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (October 2003): 383-421.

[217] Madeline Allison, "Harleston! Who is E.A. Harleston?" *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 2, no. 13 (Jan. 1924): 21-22. Emphasis mine.

with imagery drawn from African art and objects. This shift in the magazine's aesthetic also indicates another shift: the new aesthetic would be the one associated specifically with Harlem.

In 1924 and 1925, Edwin enrolled in summer courses at the Art Institute of Chicago, where he studied outdoor composition and landscape painting. His summer studies at Chicago provided him a new set of compositional tools, most notably giving him a handle on the simplified structures and flattened compositional designs already in widespread use by Modernist painters and proponents of the New Negro art movement.

A tiny sketchbook from his studies in Chicago illustrates some of Edwin's coursework there.[218] A color wheel and small geometric drawings suggest that he was refreshing his technical memory for composition. "A dark or a light pattern should pass through the composition: going across point of interest," he notes, with a corresponding rough sketch to clarify the point. On another page, he writes, "Dark value may go up gradually toward light (spot of interest in Comp)." "Point of interest should not be at dead center." And on another page: "In some comps it is impossible to trace continuous dark or light patterns through but it may be traced in grays or lighter tones: sometimes called three spot comp." Edwin spent most of his time in class, but in the afternoons he studied in the Art Institute's library. One of his professors recommended a text on composition by Henry Poore, titled *Pictorial Composition and the Critical Judgment of Pictures*

[218] Undated sketchbooks from the Collection of Mae Gentry.

(1903).[219] The book was a fairly standard guidebook in art classrooms in the mid-1920s, and Poore's description of the building blocks of composition influenced several of Edwin's subsequent studies.

In an undated series of sketches, Edwin used black and gray tempera to depict various lakeside scenes (Figure 48). In an enlargement of one of these, he painted four pine trees standing in the left side of the composition (Figure 49). In the foreground and behind them are a gray sky and a mountain pass. The lower portion of the mountain is painted in a dark gray and the upper in a lighter gray. Between these two tones is a swathe of white, which gives the mountain its contours and suggests depth: Edwin appears to have been working on the problem of using dark and light tones to represent depth. The lighter grays in the background suggest atmospheric perspective and distance, while the strong blacks and darker grays in the foreground pull the viewer's eye forward. The composition is framed in a half-circle shape, with an elaborately drawn ink frame around it.

Other works in the series indicate Edwin's efforts to work more abstractly. In two of them, Edwin paints oddly mushroom-shaped trees with long, skinny trunks, standing near water. In one, the water appears black, while the hill in the foreground is an unpainted shade of white (the off-white of the paper) (Figure 50). In another, Edwin has painted a blocky black shape, perhaps a ship, from which beams of white light shoot into

[219] Henry Rankin Poore, *Pictorial Composition and the Critical Judgment of Picture: A Handbook for Students and Lovers of Art* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1903).

the sky and illuminate a blimp and a small airplane (Figure 51). The beams of light cut across one another and the aircraft, creating different levels of shadows.

While he studied abstraction and two-dimensional design, Edwin continued his portrait practice. He received a portrait commission from the banker and real estate mogul Jesse Binga, who had bought Edwin's painting *The Bible Student* after seeing it featured in *Opportunity* magazine.[220] The portrait of Binga (now lost) and *The Bible Student* were included in a 1927 exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago as part of the "Negro in Art Week," a project spearheaded by the Chicago Woman's Club.[221] The exhibition included African objects from the Harlem Museum of Art with a selection of "Modern Paintings and Sculpture," including Edwin's paintings and works by E. M. Bannister, Charles Dawson, Arthur Diggs, Aaron Douglas, Meta Warrick Fuller, K. D. Ganaway, John Hardrick, William Harper, William Farrow, Edmonia Lewis, William Edouard Scott, Henry Ossawa Tanner, and Hale Woodruff.[222] African objects displayed included carved cups, head rests, statuettes, masks, stools, ointment boxes, earrings, knives, axes, and grinding pestles, primarily from the Bushongo peoples of the Belgian Congo. By pairing African objects with paintings made by African American artists

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[220] Edwin's painting *The Bible Student* appeared on the cover of the January 1924 issue of *Opportunity*.

[221] Lisa Meyerowitz provides an excellent discussion of the exhibition and its relationship to the New Negro rhetoric emerging out of the Harlem Renaissance in her article "The Negro in Art Week: Defining the 'New Negro' Through Art Exhibition," in *African American Review* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 75-89.

[222] The exhibition brochure notes that the organizers believed "a knowledge of the accomplishment of the Negro in the various forms of art would improve the relations between the two races…" *The Negro in Art Week*, Chicago Art Institute, 16-23 November, 1927. See also: Judith Barter and Brandon K. Ruud. "'Freedom of the Brush': American Modernism at the Art Institute of Chicago," in *American Modernism at the Art Institute of Chicago, from World War I to 1955* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2009), 17.

regardless of the differences in style and function among them, the curators posited that all of the objects shared a black aesthetic, one which was representative of modern African American identity.[223]

Perhaps the clearest articulation of how the organizers defined this black aesthetic appears in the brochure cover image, designed by Charles Dawson. In the image, Dawson depicts a stage on which several silhouetted figures stand dressed in tuxedoes (Figure 52). At the center of the stage, one figure plays the violin. Directly beneath him, in the foreground, a female figure sits at a piano. On the right-hand side of the stage, another silhouetted female figure stands with her hands behind her back. Her head is lifted, and she appears to be singing. To her right, Dawson has drawn an African sculpture that seems to look toward the pianist as she plays. A figure four times larger than the tuxedoed men looms over the composition; clothed in an Egyptian pharaoh's tunic and ceremonial mask, the black-skinned figure holds a banner which announces the exhibition's dates. The cover juxtaposes Egypt, often considered the cradle of civilization, with sophisticated, modern black performers. The alignment of modern African American performers with Egypt was a strong statement, one which indicated not only the high level of black culture in the U.S., but also reminded viewers that the cradle

[223] The exhibition brochure makes no clear statement of how the exhibition organizers define authenticity or a black aesthetic. Instead, it presents as much material as possible about a wide range of African and African American cultural projects. In the back of the exhibition brochure, the organizers published an extensive bibliography for further study. The texts listed there include "Early Books by Negroes" and "Present Day Books by Negro Authors," lists of published slave narratives, books on African art and culture, plays written by black authors, "Negro Magazines," "Negro Newspapers," and musical compositions by black composers. Art historian Lisa Meyerowitz notes, "If the fine art did not convince one of the 'New Negro's' sophistication and erudition, the bibliographical assault certainly would." Meyerowitz, "The Negro in Art Week," 76.

of human civilization was located in Africa. In the foreword, the authors note that the collection of African objects was preserved to be used as "fresh cultural inspiration for Negro art and culture in America."[224] The authors add that such inspiration already exists: "The work of some of our contemporary Negro artists has already begun to show the influence of African art, very much as modernist painting and sculpture in Europe has also felt and profited by its influence."[225]

Edwin's sketchbooks from Chicago show that he did sketch some African objects, perhaps during a visit to the "Negro in Art Week" exhibition (Figure 53).[226] His pencil drawings include a series of small African sculptures, labeled with their function: one sculpture, with an extended neck and large headdress is labeled "Food crusher and pestle." The corresponding pestle is labeled "ivory" and "mahogany." He also sketched a "harp-like instrument" and whistle and outlined two small figures, one using an instrument and the other carving a long, thin tool.[227] These images never made his way into his painted work, but they do offer a sort of precedent for the African shawl in his portrait of Sue Bailey, providing evidence that Edwin was studying African objects and perhaps considering the tenets of an African-centered Modern art as early as 1927. This study was not only precipitated by the "Negro in Art Week" exhibition, but also by

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[224] Chicago Women's Club, "The Negro in Art Week," 1927.

[225] Ibid.

[226] Though the sketch I discuss above bears marked similarities to the works shown during this exhibition, I have no evidence that Edwin traveled to Chicago for the exhibition or saw it. The point, I think, still stands.

[227] Sketchbooks in Collection of Mae Gentry.

Edwin's nomination, in 1926, for a prestigious Harmon Foundation award. He did not receive the prize; it went instead to Palmer Hayden and Hale Woodruff, younger artists who worked in a more Modernist vein.[228] William Elmer Harmon, the philanthropist who founded the Harmon Foundation, wrote to Edwin: "… your pictures were painted with sincerity and skill, but the other judges were, in my opinion, *saturated with modernism* and I being at best an unschooled judge, had to yield to them."[229] Being "saturated with modernism," for members of the Harlem Renaissance (and the Harmon Foundation), was to link up a modern painting style with signifiers of black experience and community: hence Bailey's "African" shawl. Painted five years after Locke's *New Negro* was published and Edwin's return to Charleston from Chicago, Edwin's portrait of Bailey indicates his refusal to abstract his figures into the types of modernist forms Locke

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[228] Harleston was nominated for the award by Mrs. Clelia P. McGowan, chairperson of the South Carolina Inter-Racial Committee. The William E. Harmon Awards for Distinguished Achievement Among Negroes coincided with annual exhibitions, between 1928 and 1933, which were the first to showcase the achievements of African American visual artists. The awards were created and funded by philanthropist and real estate mogul William E. Harmon.

[229] From William E. Harmon, New York, to Edwin A. Harleston, Charleston, S.C., 9 December 1926, Typewritten letter, SCHS archives. Also cited in Akua M. McDaniel, "Edwin Augustus Harleston, Portrait Painter, 1882-1931" (PhD dissertation, Emory University, 1994), 231. Emphasis mine.

The Fine Arts panel of the Harmon Foundation, which included painters Francis Coates Jones and Laura Wheeler Waring, as well as William A. Boring, the Dean of the Columbia School of Architecture, met in New York that fall to review the submissions of twelve nominated artists. Despite Harmon's vote, the remaining committee members dismissed Edwin's work. Jones notes that it was "not more than work of a photographer. Of course not bad, but they have not the painter quality. [Edwin] is 46 years old and may be considered to have done his best work." Boring reports that "while [Harleston] could paint well, he did not have the poetic soul of … a real artist." Cited in Gary A. Reynolds and Beryl J. Wright, *Against the Odds: African-American Artists and the Harmon Foundation* (Newark, N.J.: The Newark Museum, 1989), 31. Reynolds and Wright cite the Harmon Foundation Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C. Laura Wheeler Waring recommended the awards be given to the younger artists Palmer Hayden and Hale Woodruff, dismissing Edwin with her silence. Hayden won the gold medal for a seascape, Woodruff won second prize for an abstract landscape, and the committee returned Edwin's submissions—which included *The Soldier, Portrait of Reverend Ledbetter, Portrait of Mr. Miller, Portrait of a Colored Grand Army Man,* and an untitled portrait of Elise.

preferred. The portrait is Edwin's first manifesto about the role portraiture could play in representing community—it was a genre that, for him, avoided essentializing black identity.

Edwin painted another manifesto the same year: a portrait of Locke's favorite artist, Aaron Douglas (Figure 54). In the summer and fall of 1930, Edwin worked as Douglas's assistant on a series of murals at Fisk University, in Nashville, Tennessee.[230] The relationship between the two artists was mutually beneficial. Edwin wanted to learn how to paint murals, believing that he could start a mural movement at Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the South. Douglas relied upon Edwin's technical skill to complete large sections of the murals quickly.

The Fisk murals are oil paintings on canvas, hung on the walls of the university's Cravath Library. Douglas looked to "Dan masks from the Ivory Coast and Liberia, the Bamana/Bambara figures of Mali, the art of the Congo and the Gold Coast, modern-day Ghana, and Egyptian reliefs" for his design, and he intended the murals to show a teleological history of black people in "the new world."[231] He painted scenes of life in

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[230] The Fisk Murals were restored in 2003 after decades of neglect. For a thorough description of the restoration project and photographs of the murals, see Amy Helene Kirschke, "The Fisk Murals Revealed: Memories of Africa, Hope for the Future," in *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist*, ed. Susan Earle (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 115-135. For accounts of the murals by journalists of the period, see: Libbie Morrow, "Progress of Negro Race Told in Fisk Library Mural Decorations," *Nashville Banner*, September 21, 1930; Aaron Douglas, "Library Murals," *Fisk Herald* 37, no. 2 (December 1930): 16; "The Art of Aaron Douglas," *Crisis* 38, no. 5 (May 1931): 159; "Fisk University Becoming a Culture Centre," *New York Times*, September 13, 1931. The Fisk Murals are also noted in the Harmon Foundation's *Exhibition of Productions by Negro Artists* (New York: Harmon Foundation, 1933), 13-14.

[231] Kirschke, "Fisk Murals Revealed," 116.

Africa followed by images of forced diaspora and slavery in the United States.[232] In the library's North Reading Room the murals include a scene titled "Negro in Africa." The image is populated with elephants, flamingoes, lions, and large leafy trees, a fantasy jungle. Shackled together, a row of men and women are led from their homes to a slave ship bound for the United States.

As the mural project came to a close, Douglas posed for a portrait. The painting marks Edwin's most developed mastery of color and modeling (it is dramatically better than his 1912 and 1916 self portraits, for example). The portrait also demonstrates Edwin's familiarity with Douglas's design, and it subtly depicts the younger artist's reliance upon Edwin to provide the necessary tools for the project: Edwin depicts Douglas in a smock with palette and paintbrushes in hand—all of these *accoutrements* were borrowed from Edwin.

Portrait of Aaron Douglas is unique in Edwin's *oeuvre* because it includes a developed background: in the majority of his portraiture, Edwin painted the background in flat, neutral shades. In the Douglas portrait, however, Edwin paints Douglas standing in front of a section of his murals. Edwin's decision to include the mural demonstrates to the viewer that Edwin was involved in their creation—indeed, that he could (and did) paint them too. As he did in his portrait of Sue Bailey, Edwin places referents to the New Negro aesthetic behind the portrait's subject in his *Portrait of Aaron Douglas*: here Edwin argues for portraiture over (literally in front of) the new aesthetic.

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[232] Cited in Kirschke, 116. Aaron Douglas, interview by Leslie M. Collins, July 16, 1971, Black Oral History Program, Fisk University Franklin Library Special Collections, Nashville.

Douglas's murals frequently combined African imagery with scenes of life in the South (part of the teleological story of African American experience in the United States that he developed throughout his work), and he repeatedly used the South's history of slavery and violence as a counterweight to images of the modern jazz-age, which he located in symbols of cities, such as D.C. and New York. In 1929, Douglas created an illustration titled *Charleston* for the book *Black Magic* by Paul Morand (Figure 56).[233] In the image, a woman wearing pearls sits languorously with two male figures, watching as a jazz band performs for them. The musicians are bathed in circular haloes of color. But the scene is interrupted by threatening omens. Behind the woman, gnarled hands grasp and claw their way toward her. And directly in the center of the picture plane is a white noose. In this image, Charleston is depicted not as a specific place, but as a stand-in for the racist violence of the region as a whole. Simultaneously, Douglas uses Charleston as a symbol for African American cultural production (of jazz and the Charleston dance, for example), and he critiques white supremacy and Southern racism by alluding to the power of black cultural forms by making a kind of universal black figure. To construct his image of the New Negro, Douglas relied upon the belief that escape from the South to the North was the only option for modern black identity. In *An Idyll of the Deep South*, part of his 1934 mural *Aspects of Negro Life* painted at the Schomburg Center in New York, several figures work with hoes and shovels to cultivate the earth (Figure 56). Others dance while two central figures play a guitar and a banjo. Still others look up toward a beam of light emanating from a north star—a clear reference to the

[233] Paul Morand, *Black Magic* (New York: Viking Press, 1929).

Underground Railroad, but also an allusion to the Great Migration of African Americans away from the South in the early decades of the 20th century. Even in its most idyllic form, Douglas's South is a place to leave. Edwin's most decisive break with the New Negro philosophy came, in contrast, from his insistence on the possibility of a new future *in* the South.

Edwin's most pronounced look forward came the same year he painted portraits of Bailey and Douglas. In those portraits, he painted figures associated with the future-oriented community of artists and civic leaders in New York, but he did so in a genre associated with the past. In 1930, Edwin tried his hand at a new type of work: public lectures. Faced with declining commissions as a result of the stock market crash in 1929, the Harlestons were busy strategizing about ways to keep their business afloat. In September 1930, Elise wrote jokingly to Edwin about the funeral home, "Business is positively DEAD. I guess we need a new President."[234] During her visit to Charleston, Bailey encouraged Edwin to visit Lincoln Academy at King's Mountain, a missionary school located in North Carolina. He took her advice and visited the school, giving a lecture in which he described the process of making a painting. He was encouraged by the Lincoln Academy audience's response to his lecture, and he wrote to Elise with a business idea: he hoped to do a series of similar lectures at black universities and schools throughout the South. He called the lecture "Building a Picture."

[234] Letter from Elise to Edwin, dated Sept. 26, 1930. SCHS Folder 25-62-5 E. A. Harleston 1930.

Edwin and Elise drafted and mailed letters to universities across the South, offering Edwin's services as a lecturer and describing the presentation as follows:

> The lecture is designed to show what the artist has in mind in designing a picture, describes by illustration the methods employed from the beginning to the finished work and helps the hearers to appreciate as never before what to look for in a work of art. It should appeal especially to a college community as it deals with so important a phase of our cultural life.
>
> The demonstration will prove a most unique phase of the evening, as I will paint from life a one-sitting portrait of some person designated by you (preferably a student) in about one hour and a quarter. Few Southern audiences have seen this feat.[235]

In February 1931, he gave the lecture at Talladega College in Alabama and at Fort Valley High and Industrial School in Georgia. The Fort Valley newspaper offers the only published account of the presentation:

> While a large audience of students, teachers and people of the community sat in rapt silence for an hour and a quarter in the auditorium of the Fort Valley High and Industrial School here last Thursday night, E. A. Harleston of Charleston, S.C., distinguished Negro portrait artist, with swift, deft strokes of his brush did a likeness in oils of Beulah Drake, student of the 10th grade.[236]

Edwin's sketchbooks and notes offer some hints as to what the lecture portion of the presentation included. An outline of "Building a Picture," from the lecture's first incarnation at King's Mountain indicates that the lecture was broad in its scope.[237] He began with the formal components of a picture: geometry, motifs, light, and color.

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[235] SCHS Archives. Folder 25-62-5 E.A. Harleston 1930.

[236] SCHS archives: Folder 25-62-9. News clipping, undated, from Fort Valley, Ga. "Harleston Paints Fort Valley Girl."

[237] Although this is the same sketchbook Edwin used during his coursework in Chicago in 1924 and 1925, the chronological anomaly is not surprising: Edwin frequently reused his sketchbooks, writing in tiny cursive to conserve space.

Discussing composition, Edwin focused upon the use of light, its values, source, direction, and reflection. He spoke about ways of arranging objects in a composition, and he offered examples of Japanese influences on modern composition.

He spoke also about African art in Egypt and Zimbabwe, explaining distinctions between functional objects and decorative things. He followed his discussion of African art with "The modern use of Afr. Motifs and Archipenko," and then with a cursory art historical overview of the work of Rubens, Titian, various Spanish painters, and Arabic influence on Spanish architecture. Following these, he discusses "Bannister, Tanner, et. al. Edmonia Lewis, Meta Warrick, Scott Harper?"

Though his notes are cursory, they indicate Edwin's attempt to develop an art historical sketch leading from ancient to modern art, highlighting the African and African American contributions to this global history. In his lecture, Edwin synthesized the relationship between Modern art and African influence that he had observed in the "Negro in Art Week" exhibition and in the Fisk University murals. He outlined for his audience a nascent art history, in which he included the most contemporary ideas and artists of his time. And, significantly, he demonstrated to his audience the way in which he painted portraits: his portrait practice became a teaching moment. He writes:

> …One of the reasons why a larger number of the race has not entered the field of the fine arts has been the lack of encouragement and support accorded artists in the past. But with the unprecedented advancement of the race in economic affairs it is to be hoped that more and more the more enlightened ones will give increased attention to the fine arts which is the surest indication of real culture.[238]

[238] Notes in Edwin's handwriting, titled "The Negro in the Fine Arts – Painting." Collection of Mae Gentry, box 7.

In “Building a Picture,” Edwin placed his own artistic practice in dialogue with the historical and contemporary currents of modern art, and he used his compositional techniques and training to create a teaching moment. Rather than taking a conservative approach to works which were quite different from his own, Edwin included diverse examples in an introductory survey of composition, global art history, and modern art. His particular visual style was only one component of a much more expansive talk: what Edwin hoped was that his listeners would understand art to be accessible and relevant to them. And, in the process of building the lecture, Edwin constructed a new model of art history—one which included black artists and African precedents—intended to inspire the young people in his audience to become artists. Here, as a teacher, Edwin looked forward.

AFTERWARD

Although Albert Hinton had been meaning to clean out his garage for years, an unusual winter storm in Los Angeles was what finally convinced him to do it. As icicles melted into the work room where he kept tools for his car restoration projects, water seeped into cardboard boxes and created a mess. He had entirely forgotten about one of the boxes, and when he began sifting through its contents he found a collection of glass negatives wrapped in tissue paper. These negatives were the remaining plates that his great-aunt, Elise Harleston, had preserved from her days as a photographer in the 1920s. After Edwin's premature death in 1931 from pneumonia, Elise packed up her camera and negatives and moved away from Charleston, eventually settling in Los Angeles.

The negatives that Hinton found in the 1990s are one of the only known collections of Elise's work. Prints have been made from them, and they have been shared with family members and with book writers who come looking for Edwin's work. The negatives are packed carefully away on the top shelf of a closet in Elise's former home. Next to them are photo albums full of family photographs—some taken by Elise and others taken by generations of her family—which span most of the 20th century and into the 21st. In the Hintons' closet, studio portraits, posed family photographs, and snapshots exist in the same space, in the same albums and boxes.

If Edwin's "Building a Picture" lecture breaks out of the conventional usages of portraiture and replaces commemoration with a pedagogical function, Elise's non-studio

photographs—her snapshots of friends and family—offer the clearest evidence of her own break with and reuse of the conventions of portraiture.

Snapshots—"photographs taken quickly with a minimum of deliberate posing on the part of the people represented and with a minimum of deliberate selectivity on the part of the photographer so far as vantage point and the framing or cropping of the image are concerned"—broaden our understanding of Elise's studio practice, placing it within a specific local community and time.[239] In these images, Elise recorded social moments, documenting picnics, club dinners, and dances held in Charleston in casual, unposed images. One series of photographs documents an excursion to the beach. In one photograph, a group of women in bathing suits and swimming caps sit on the front porch of a wooden cabin (Figure 57). In another, they lounge in a pile on the beach (Figure 58). A group of the same women pose in their bathing suits post-swim (Figure 59). In this photograph, their caps are gone, and their hair is mussed. In another beach photograph, we see three men, including Edwin, standing together (Figure 60). The two other men each stand with one arm reaching out to each other's shoulders, creating a line that connects all three. Edwin stands squarely facing the camera and smiling. The beach photographs share a casual amiability which the viewer can see through the figures' shared touch; the friends lean on each other, hug closely, or lightly reach for a shoulder. Apart from Edwin and Elise, I can identify none of the individuals in the image.

[239] I take this definition of snapshot from John A. Kouwenhoven's lecture "Living in a Snapshot World," reprinted in *The Snapshot*, ed. Jonathan Green, *Aperture* 19, no. 1 (New York: Aperture, 1974), 106.

Other photographs in the albums document the Harleston's family. In a photograph dated December 1930, Elise hand-tinted a studio portrait of seven of her nieces and nephews (Figure 61). She then cut it out of the print and re-pasted it onto a piece of construction paper. She numbered each of the children and created a correspondingly numbered list of their names and birthdays. Her niece, Doris Harleston, hugs a doll baby. Walter Felder holds a ball, and a solemn Thomas Forrest clutches a stringed instrument, perhaps a fiddle, under his arm.[240]

In another snapshot, three young children play in a dirt yard in the mid-afternoon (Figure 62). The two older children wheel a toddler in a hand-pushed buggy. The fat baby sits with a finger in her mouth. All three stare at the camera. Behind them, a chicken pecks the ground, and in the foreground, Elise's shadow intrudes into the picture plane. Similar to the portrait of Sue Bailey in which Elise's studio is everywhere apparent, in this photograph Elise is as an active presence, shaping an old tradition in relation to a new one. "The snapshot may look forward in time to a chaotic, radically photographic structure, the appropriate equivalent of modern experience; or it may look backward to the frontal formal family portrait of a bygone age," writes Jonathan Green.[241]

Elise's archive provides visual records of family and community as it chose to represent itself, as it celebrated important events, as it gathered casually, as it documented

[240] The photograph is a reminder of Elise and Edwin's growing family responsibilities. Though they never had children, they adopted and took care of many of their nieces and nephews. His brother and her sister both contracted tuberculosis and went away to a convalescent camp for years until their deaths. Their children came to live with family members, including Elise and Edwin, in Charleston.

[241] Jonathan Green, ed. *The Snapshot*. *Aperture* 19, no. 1 (New York: Aperture, 1974), 3.

its experiences over time. While artists of the Charleston Renaissance looked longingly at the city's past, Elise created intimate collections that documented her present—a vibrant, modern community of individuals. The intimacy of the collection allows for rich readings between studio and vernacular practice, but these are readings that defy conventions of historical writing, which often favors public over private evidence, polished over seemingly haphazard creations. Elise's family snapshots and her photograph albums conform to a different set of historical image-making conventions that are not haphazard but are, rather, based in the highly localized contexts of home, family, and friendship.

CHAPTER THREE

Race and Regional Imagination:

Exhibitions at the New South in Montgomery, 1939-1940

> Now if one notices carefully one will see that between these two worlds, despite much physical contact and daily intermingling, there is almost no community of intellectual life or point of transference where the thoughts and feelings of one race can come into direct contact and sympathy with the thoughts and feelings of the other.[242]
>
> - W. E. B. DU BOIS, *THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK*

In 1939, a group of six men and women in their 20s organized a gallery and art school in Montgomery, Alabama, which they called The New South.[243] There they hosted a diverse schedule of activities, including exhibitions, plays, discussion groups, and courses in music appreciation, German, drawing, painting, literature, and writing. The gallery was located on the top floor of a former cotton warehouse on Commerce Street in

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242 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 177-178.

243 The group pulled the term "New South" from popular use; since the Reconstruction-era, politicians in the South had been touting a New South which would develop industry and urban commerce to rise from the destruction of the Civil War and match the rest of the country in production. See especially Henry Grady, "To the New England Club in New York, 1886," in Joel Chandler Harris, *Life of Henry W. Grady* (Cassell Publishing Company, 1890) and in Paul D. Escott and David R. Goldfield, *Major Problems in the History of the American South*, Vol. II, *The New South* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1990), 71–73. For a thorough discussion of the adoption of a New South mythology in the post-Reconstruction South, see Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: a study in southern mythmaking* (New York: Knopf, 1970). Or see Gaston's more concise elaboration of the problem in Paul M. Gaston, "The 'New South,'" in *Writing Southern History: Essays in Historiography in Honor of Fletcher M. Green*, ed. Arthur S. Link and Rembert W. Patrick (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 316-336.

Originally conceived by George and Jean Lewis, Charles Shannon, Paul Sanderson, Mattie Mae Knight, and Blanche Balzer, all native Montgomerians, the New South's roots were in a local bookstore, The Booklovers Stop, run by Pauline Arrington and Sadie Elmore.

the city's downtown, and it included a small bookstore.[244] What follows is a study of three exhibitions put on by the New South between 1939 and 1940. Each of these exhibitions reveals a different aspect of the New South's leftist politics and the ways in which these politics were rooted in issues of indigeneity, rural life, race, and class.

The New South's exhibitions of paintings, Southern folk art, and agricultural processes drew from exhibition practices at other institutions, including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. At MoMA, curators such as Alfred Barr and Rene d'Harnoncourt allowed for dynamic interplay between "high" and "low" art forms. The MoMA showed *American Folk Art: The Art of the Common Man in America, 1750-1900* in 1932-1933, the *Westchester Folk Art Exhibition* in the summer of 1934, and *American Folk Art* in 1937-1938 while it was also showing exhibitions of work by Modern artists and architects, such as *Early Modern Architecture: Chicago 1870-1910* (1933), *Modern European Art* (1933), *Paintings by Paul Cézanne from the Museum* (1937), and *Vincent Van Gogh* (1937).[245] Many of the exhibitions at MoMA throughout the 1930s

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[244] Commerce Street was the New South's second location. Its initial headquarters were at 24 ½ Dexter Avenue. The bookstore probably consisted of a table featuring new publications about the South and contemporary literature for sale, as well as New South announcements and the group's literary bulletin.

[245] MoMA maintains an exhibition history list, which is accessible online at: http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/archives_exhibition_history_list

Interestingly, such experimentation does not seem to have been unique to New York institutions. The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts displayed "furniture, silver, china, pictures, historical relics, and one old shoe," in its first exhibition upon opening in 1930. And, under the direction of May P. Houghton (Mrs. Harry S. Houghton), the museum provided various groups with their own rooms in the museum to exhibit art and cultural artifacts. These included a room of Native American relics provided by The Anthropological Society of Alabama, a Colonial period furnished room by the Colonial Dames, a room of "Early American Life" created by the Daughters of the American Revolution, antebellum decorative arts and furniture selected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and geological materials installed by the state geologist, Walter B. Jones. Plans were also put in place for an exhibition of nature specimens collected by the Boy Scouts, and arts and crafts from Montgomery's public schools, collected by the Parent

emphasized the interconnections between Modernism and non-Western art, craft traditions, and functional objects. For example, a 1933 exhibition was titled *American Sources of Modern Art* and it positioned Aztec, Maya, and Inca art as major influences upon Fauvists, Cubists, and Mexican Muralists. In the 1937 exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism,* curator Alfred Barr drew comparisons between contemporary Dada and Surrealist works, and works made by children and people institutionalized for mental disabilities, as well as "commercial and journalistic art," "miscellaneous objects and pictures with a Surrealist character," and "scientific objects."[246] In his introduction to the exhibition catalogue, Barr writes that he did not intend the exhibition to "sponsor a particular aspect of modern art," but rather to allow viewers the chance to draw comparisons and study similarities in the objects.[247]

Exhibitions at the New South also took a comparative and wide-ranging approach. The group's first exhibition, for example, paired paintings by New South member John Lapsley with a display of Shearwater Pottery made in Mississippi. The group held an exhibition of drawings and paintings by self-taught Alabama artist Bill Traylor in 1940, and the corresponding exhibition pamphlet compared Traylor's work to that of Picasso. Two group members also created murals—intended to complement the Traylor exhibition (one of the murals depicted Traylor at work)—on the gallery walls. Another exhibition

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Teachers Association. C. Reynolds Brown, *The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts: A Handbook to the Collection* (Montgomery: Walker Printing, 1980), 13.

246 Alfred H. Barr, Jr., ed. *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, Simon and Schuster, 1936).

247 Ibid., 9.

portrayed the growth of corn, from seed to harvest. The paintings and exhibitions made by New South members illustrate ways that the group combined elements associated with Regionalism, Mexican Muralism, and Modernism. Their exhibitions indicate the diversity of exhibition practices taking place during the period—a diversity which was foundational to early definitions of Modernism. A study of the New South also reveals slippages between and across what have subsequently become established art historical frameworks: the New South demonstrates how artists interpreted cultural signifiers which are now categorized as quite different from each other, drawing them together as part of the same aesthetic project. Considered in the context of the New South community and its activities, the New South's projects also indicate some of the larger concerns behind the group's formation. In their diverse projects, the artists of the New South confronted thorny issues of race, regional identity, community, and power. They did so in a visual vocabulary and exhibition practice they observed elsewhere and adapted to their Montgomery context.

A photograph of several members of the New South Gallery and Art School, taken in 1939 illustrates a central interest shared by the group.[248] The photograph shows eight people sitting closely together, looking directly at the camera (Figure 63). Four sit on a couch, and the others gather around them. Some of them smile amiably, and others

[248] The photograph was kept in a private collection until the late 1980s, when it was given to curator Miriam Rogers Fowler. The photograph is one of the few existing images of the group. Much like the now-famous "Irascibles" photograph of Abstract Expressionist painters taken in 1951 by Nina Leen for *LIFE* magazine, or the 1956 or 1957 group photograph of students and teachers at Black Mountain College, the New South photograph documents the group's members, as they presented themselves together for the camera.

hold drinks or cigarettes. It does not appear to have been intended for publication or wide distribution; it is a small print, and it bears the casual composition of a snapshot.

The photograph's articulation of what constituted the New South community comes most clearly not from the posing individuals but, instead, from an intentional framing device used by the photographer. Although the people in the image are, ostensibly, the photographer's subject, he or she has chosen to fill less than half of the image with them. Above where they sit, we see a broad swath of white wall. At the top of this blank wall space hangs a painting, slightly off-center and extending out of the photograph's top border. The painting depicts the face of a black man. The painted man's high cheekbones and arched eyebrows are created by thick, dramatic lines. His lips and nose are wide and exaggerated. His eyes look up and out to the side of the painting, not meeting the spectator's gaze. The graininess of the photograph obscures the artist's signature on the painting, and the painting is unframed. It is the only work of art visible in the image, and it underscores the fact that all the New South members who sit below it are white. If we can view the photograph as a kind of community statement, it indicates that one of the most important organizing factors for the group was its members' interest in African American culture and its representation. Such a supposition is supported by other aspects of the group's work: by the relationship between New South member Charles Shannon and self-taught artist Bill Traylor, by a 1940 exhibition of Traylor's work at the New South, by several of the group's activities, by the books that members read, and by members' statements and subsequent interviews.

One might presume that this interest was of local origin, based in Southern experience and history. I propose, instead, that the New South's local context and interests united them with a much broader community, spread across North America. African American figures were the subject matter through which New South artists represented Southern regional identity and explored local indigeneity. In Mexico and New York, the New South artists found creative communities which shared their interests in experiences of foreignness and exotification, and in comparisons of "home" and "abroad." As central destinations for American intellectuals, New York and Mexico functioned as signifiers for the type of community that the New South hoped to develop in Montgomery: leftist, intellectual, reform-minded, creative, and cosmopolitan. New York and Mexico also provided examples of visual practices and exhibitions that drew from ideas about authenticity and indigeneity. By traveling to New York and Mexico, the New South members participated in (and unintentionally became the subjects of) historically specific discourse: their interest in local African American culture was an extension of this discursive participation.

IMAGINING MEXICO, IMAGINING THE SOUTH

In the 1920s and 1930s, hundreds of artists from the United States—including several of the New South members—traveled to Mexico looking for inspiration.[249] "They came to Mexico by train or boat or car," writes art historian James Oles, "motivated by Mexico's artistic scene, by an inexpensive cost of living and a delightful climate, by a search for unspoiled landscapes and an ancient culture more difficult to find in the States."[250] Many of them came to see for themselves the effects of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), especially as they were represented in the emerging mural movement. The New South members who went to Mexico claimed that it had a large impact upon their work—there they saw contemporary art and murals alongside Mexican

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[249] During the 1920s and 1930s, authors and artists from the United States published a huge corpus of literature about Mexico, Mexican art, and folk culture. Some relevant sources include: Anita Brenner, *Your Mexican Holiday, A Modern Guide* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1932); Stuart Chase, *Mexico: A Study of Two Americas* (New York: Macmillan, 1931); and William Spratling, *Little Mexico* (New York: Cape & Smith, 1932). Between 1925 and 1933, United States expatriate Frances Toor published an influential journal about Mexican folk culture and contemporary art called *Mexican Folkways*. Toor writes of the journal's purpose: "I wanted *Mexican Folkways* to express the Mexico that interested me so keenly, it has not only described customs, but has touched upon art, music, archaeology, and the Indian himself as part of the new social trends, thus presenting him as a complete human being. And in order that the magazine might mean something to the Mexicans as well as to outsiders, everything has been published in both English and Spanish." There is also an extensive body of secondary literature about the cultural relations between the United States and Mexico in the 1930s. Some useful sources to consult include: Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992); R. Tripp Evans, *Romancing the Maya: Mexican Antiquity in the American Imagination, 1820-1915* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); Marjorie Ingle, *The Mayan Revival Style, Art Deco Mayan Fantasy* (Salt Lake City: G. M. Smith, 1984); Benjamin Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971); James Oles, *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination, 1914-1947* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993); and Donald Lewis Zelman, "American Intellectual Attitudes Toward Mexico, 1908-1940" (PhD dissertation, Ohio State University, 1969).

[250] James Oles, *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination, 1914-1947* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 5.

traditional arts and crafts. By the 1930s, a trip to Mexico had become a formative part of any American artist's training; it was an American equivalent of the 18th and 19th-century European Grand Tour. Well known artists such as Edward Weston and Tina Modotti exhibited their work in Mexico, and were deeply influenced by their time there; William Spratling started an artist community in Taxco; and Milton Avery, George Biddle, Caroline Durieux, Winold Reiss, Paul Strand, and Hale Woodruff all spent time working in Mexico.[251] Mexican artists also traveled to the United States: José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Álfaro Siqueiros were well known for their mural projects and for teaching art classes in the United States. Artists Emilio Amero, Jean Charlot, Miguel Covarrubias, María Izquierdo, Frida Kahlo, and Rufino Tamayo would have been familiar names to those involved with art in the U.S. "Mexico is on everyone's lips, -- Mexico and her artists," Weston wrote in February 1932.[252] The reason everyone was talking about Mexico was twofold: it offered an affordable, relatively close, and exotic destination for Americans, and the country was the subject of several circulating exhibitions of Mexican arts and crafts in the United States throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

A 1932 gouache painting by French aristocrat cum MoMA curator René d'Harnoncourt caricatures the well-established presence of the gringo artist in Mexico

[251] Taxco became a popular destination for artists after William Spratling, the artist and cartoonist who collaborated with William Faulkner in New Orleans in the 1920s, settled there in 1931 and opened a silver workshop.

[252] Edward Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, ed. Nancy Newhall (Rochester, N.Y.: George Eastman House, 1961), 2:244.

(Figure 64). In the painting, a man with dark blonde hair sits beside cacti with a sketchpad in hand. He wears clothing from the tourist markets: a brightly colored serape and a straw hat and shoes accent his polo shirt and slacks. Next to him are several examples of Mexican folk art. He has tucked a small black sculpture into a bag embroidered with an orange cow. A handmade ceramic vase sits beside the bag. Despite the care with which he has gathered these objects of supposedly authentic Mexican folk culture, the artist seems to ignore the dramatic mountainous landscape behind him, the red-tiled roofs of the homes in the valley, and the large Mexican man who stands right beside him, dressed in a modern suit and hat. Tellingly, the artist's glasses make him seem blind—d'Harnoncourt paints their lenses as opaque white glass.[253] For many visitors, the idea of Mexico mattered more than the contemporary conditions of life in Mexico. Whether or not the American artists who traveled to Mexico really saw their surroundings, like d'Harnoncourt's blind tourist, they often imagined that they were keen observers of Mexican life and art. Few visiting artists (with the exception, perhaps, of Tina Modotti) explored Mexico's emergent modernity. These visitors looked instead to Mexican folk culture and craft traditions, considering them to be authentic expressions of Mexican national culture.[254]

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[253] d'Harnoncourt later became the director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. His experiences as an artist and curator and as a collector of folk art in Mexico were credentials understood by his contemporaries as indicators of his qualification for the position. d'Harnoncourt was director of MoMA from 1949 to 1968.

[254] See Rick A. López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

The impulse to imagine Mexico through its folk art was fueled by a community of artists, writers, publishers, curators, and historians living in Mexico City who were invested in articulating a post-revolutionary national identity. Historian Rick A. López writes, "What set postrevolutionaries apart from their predecessors was that they celebrated the living indigenous heritage as a vital component, even the foundation, of Mexico's authentic national identity."[255] Celebration of indigenous culture, however, was contingent upon the interests of the cultural elite:

> What emerged in the late 1930s, and which found reinforcement in subsequent decades, was a situation in which elites and the state tended to accept broad definitions of Indianness when such breadth served their own interests, denigrated subordinate groups, or justified state intervention; but they proved less accommodating when definitions of Indianness were linked to allocations of funds and resources, or when they were used to honor indigenous people, or else were used by indigenous people themselves as a basis for demanding rights or benefits.[256]

As López demonstrates, the role folk art played in a post-revolutionary emergent nationalism was crucial. Visitors to Mexico and Mexican nationals repeatedly looked to folk arts as expressions of *mexicanidad*, even while they disregarded or felt ambivalent about the indigenous communities and individuals who made the objects. In many ways, the folk objects replaced the indigenous populations in the minds of their collectors, making an image of Mexico that was more palatable to the urban arts communities which "discovered," purchased, and exhibited them. This idea of Mexican identity found its visual form in Olmec jade sculptures, ceramics from Guerrero, and lacquered decorative

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[255] Ibid., 7.

[256] Ibid., 11.

objects made in Michoacan.[257] Two exhibitions presented this Mexican folk aesthetic to a U.S. audience: the *Mexican Arts* show which was curated by d'Harnoncourt and traveled to 13 U.S. cities between 1930 and 1932 and the 1940 exhibition *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* hosted by MoMA and the Instituto de Antropología e Historia de México in Mexico City. In both exhibitions, the curators collapsed contemporary with ancient and colonial arts, and combined "applied art" and "fine art" to create exhibitions representative of national identity.

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In the summer of 1939, Lapsley traveled to Mexico City, where he met Diego Rivera, David Álfaro Siqueiros, and María Izquierdo, and he bought a woodcut by Rufino Tamayo. "Mexico… was to us what the French Revolution had been to France… It was where the locus of all the painting…new painting came from. … It was what influenced our work," he said in a 1989 interview.[258] Lapsley's work was shown in the New South's first exhibition that same summer. The show included eleven works in oil, Duco, watercolor, and pastels paired with a collection of Shearwater Pottery made by the

[257] Here I list objects which were included in the 1940 exhibition *20 Centuries of Mexican Art*. *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 7, no. 2/3 (May 1940): 2-14.

[258] Miriam Fowler interview with John Lapsley, April 17, 1989, p. 3.
In the 1930s, Mexican art and artists were widely associated with leftist political activism. Art historian James Wechsler writes, "… in the Depression-era United States the equation of contemporary Mexican art and radical leftist politics had been firmly established in the mainstream tabloid press." James Wechsler, "Beyond the Border: The Mexican Mural Movement's Reception in Soviet Russia and the United States," in *1900-1950: Mexican Modern Art*, ed. Luis-Martín Lozano (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1999), 51.

Anderson family in Ocean Springs, Mississippi.[259] Lapsley's paintings included works titled *Babies Dancing*, *Scavengers*, *Child with Bottle*, *Street Preacher*, and *Little Girls with Charcoal Sacks*, and they depicted working class Alabama subjects whose misshapen bodies and grotesque faces mirrored the ugliness of their impoverished surroundings. A short brochure offers the only extant description of the Shearwater pieces included in the exhibition:

> This exhibit consists of plain glazed pieces, carved and underglazed bowls and vases and glazed figurines. As examples of the plain glazed pieces, the large, lavender bowl and the small, deep-red bowl are typical. They are the work of Peter Anderson. Walter I. Anderson carved the large green pitcher and the pale, green-blue candle holder, from a design originated by him and his brother, James McConnell Anderson.[260]

In the New South's Constitution, the authors stated the group's intention to place Southern arts and crafts in dialogue with one another:

> New South is a call to the musician, writer, sculptor, painter, weaver, bookbinder, printer, potter, photographer: artist and craftsman, amateur, and layman
> a call to cooperate – produce and consume – unite that the South may realize its cultural possibilities, that our daily lives may be impregnated with our own living arts.[261]

Pairing Shearwater pottery with Lapsley's paintings of Southern subjects reflects a curatorial choice by the New South which related to the group's goals of exhibiting evidence of a vibrant regional art world, one in which contemporary painting existed in

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[259] There are few texts about the Shearwater family and almost nothing has been written about the Shearwater Pottery. See Redding S. Sugg Jr., *A Painter's Psalm: The Mural from Walter Anderson's Cottage* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992); Redding S. Sugg Jr., *Walter Anderson's* Illustrations of Epic and Voyage (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980); and Christopher Maurer, *Dreaming in Clay on the Coast of Mississippi* (New York: Doubleday, 2000).

[260] New South exhibition brochure, dated June 3-30, 1939. Copy in author's possession.

[261] New South manifesto and constitution, 1939. From the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts Artist File.

dialogue with contemporary craft. The pairing of Lapsley's work with Shearwater pottery bears some conceptual affinities to the promotion of Mexican folk art as emblematic of national identity in post-revolutionary Mexico. In the case of the New South exhibition, a supposedly indigenous Southern life was chosen to be representative of the region's emerging identity, as a New South. This indigenous Southern identity was represented by Southern craft (Shearwater pottery) and by Lapsley's paintings of working class subjects.[262]

The style and subject matter of Lapsley's paintings was directly influenced by Mexican sources. Originally from Selma, Alabama, Lapsley lived in New York City for a year, from 1935 to 1936. There he studied with Emilio Amero and Jean Charlot at the Florence Cane School.[263] Amero (1901-1976) was a muralist, lithographer, photographer, and filmmaker who had studied at the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City before moving to the U.S. via Cuba. Charlot (1898-1979) was a French painter who moved to Mexico in 1920 and apprenticed under Diego Rivera. He painted murals at the National Preparatory School and at the Ministry of Education in Mexico City, and he served as art

[262] A brief mention of the exhibition in the *Montgomery Advertiser* calls Lapsley's paintings scenes of "southern life," reinforcing the idea that the paintings were supposed to represent something specific to the region. *Montgomery Advertiser,* June 4, 1939, p. 2.

[263] After a year of study in New York, Lapsley returned to Alabama and enrolled in Birmingham Southern College, where he studied English and continued to paint. In May of 1939, he received a letter from his friend Paul Sanderson in Montgomery, apprising him of developments at the New South Gallery and Art School: "The New South now has three rooms upstairs in the 200 block of Dexter. We are planning to open on June 1st." In the letter, Sanderson invites Lapsley to show his paintings in the first exhibition at the New South's gallery and he adds, "get down here as quick as you can." Letter from Paul Sanderson to John Lapsley, dated May 15, 1939. From the collection of Miriam Rogers Fowler.

editor of *Mexican Folkways* from 1924 to 1926.[264] Paintings by both Amero and Charlot were included in the Modern Art section of the *20 Centuries of Mexican Art* exhibition.

The two painters introduced Lapsley to the technique of fresco painting, and they encouraged him to experiment with Duco paint (a fast-drying automotive paint popularized by David Alfaro Siqueiros) and lithography. Like his teachers, Lapsley employed a style marked by disproportionate body sizes and stylized features. His working-class subjects, like theirs, appear in tattered, simple clothing, and he rendered them with flat blocks of color.

In his painting *Babies Dancing* (1938), Lapsley depicts two black toddlers wearing oversized shirts (Figure 65). The children stand next to each other. One stands facing forward, and the other turns his back to the viewer. Their heads are disproportionately enlarged, and their dance seems joyless. One of the children appears to look straight at the viewer. His eyes are squinted and recessed under heavy lids. Creases across his forehead combine with the dull look of his eyes and his enlarged facial features to make the child's face appear prematurely aged. The bulky shirts the children wear heighten a tension between infancy and adulthood in the figures' appearance. The shirts seem to have been made for adults. The figure facing away from the viewer appears clothed in a shapeless blue garment. Between the figure's legs a white piece of fabric dangles loosely, suggesting an ill-fitting cloth diaper. By painting Southern subjects

[264] Karen Thompson, "Jean Charlot: Artist and Scholar," n.d. Biographical essay available at the website of the Jean Charlot Collection, http://libweb.hawaii.edu/libdept/charlotcoll/J_Charlot/charlotthompson.html. Accessed 18 May 2012.

marked by poverty and by emphasizing their abjection, Lapsley made use of a popular image of Southern life, and he did so in a style directly influenced by his teachers.[265]

When he returned from his trip to Mexico in the summer of 1939, Lapsley painted a mural (now destroyed) in the New South gallery. In it, he depicted a black man kneeling on a rectangular platform (Figure 66). The man's hands are shown crossed. In the only existing photograph of the work, the man's face is indistinguishable.[266] Members of the New South remembered the mural's subject as a man breaking free from his chains.[267] There are no other figures, objects, or structures in the painting; the man fills almost the entire pictorial space and, even in a kneeling position, the figure is approximately five feet tall.

Lapsley's mural mirrors one painted by New South member Charles Shannon around the same time, which was situated on the same wall, on the opposite side of a door. Shannon's mural depicts Montgomery artist Bill Traylor (Figure 67). Shannon paints Traylor hunched over a drawing. He is tightly framed by a doorway, and he is solidly built, with strong shoulders and a workman's clothing—he wears a white shirt and blue pants, with suspenders. His face is turned down to his work in a moment of concentration, and only his white beard and eyebrows hint at his age. His hands are

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[265] Similarly dispirited and abject figures appear also in Erskine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road* (New York: Grosset & Dunlop, 1932), in Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White's photo-documentary book *You Have Seen Their Faces* (New York: Viking Press, 1937), and in Dorothea Lange, *American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1939).

[266] Unknown photographer. Photograph reproduced in Josef Helfenstein and Roman Kurzmeyer, *Deep Blues: Bill Traylor, 1854-1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 101.

[267] Interview with Miriam Rogers Fowler, April 10, 2010.

massive. He holds a pencil in one hand, and with his other hand he carefully balances the paper on his lap. Shannon paints Traylor at an impressive scale, broadening his shoulders and emphasizing his powerful musculature.

Both paintings convey a sense of claustrophobia; the figures in each image appear boxed in, their bodies straining at the parameters of the murals. Both figures are situated on platforms. Lapsley's figure appears to be kneeling on a square, wooden platform, perhaps an auction block. Traylor appears to be seated on a stool which is atop a square platform. Below Traylor's feet, on the front side of the platform, Shannon painted six of Traylor's drawings. The drawings appear displayed on the street, much as they were during Traylor's lifetime. While he sat and drew or painted under a small awning on Monroe Street, passersby could gather and view the works he spread around him.[268]

Given the formal relationship between the two murals and their placement, they were likely read as a pair, with a conceptual relationship between them. Lapsley's mural references slavery, an event of the region's past. As the figure in the mural breaks from his chains, he also indicates a break from that past. Seen in relation to Lapsley's mural, Shannon's mural posits the New South's optimism about Southern culture. Traylor's drawings, because they exist outside Western training and aesthetics, functioned for the New South as an example of authentic indigenous creation. The drawings provided the group with a proposition for the future of Southern culture, located in its native arts. Like the Lapsley/Shearwater exhibition, here imagery of local African Americans combined with Traylor's paintings to posit something the group considered both local and forward

[268] The street's official name is Monroe Ave., but here I use the name that locals did.

looking. The group's shared sense that art could effect change in the region was reaffirmed by the knowledge that Traylor was a former slave; whereas Lapsley's mural depicts a slave breaking from his chains, Shannon's mural depicts a former slave liberated by artistic production.

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Shannon first traveled to Mexico in 1936, after graduating from the Cleveland School of Art. It was the Alabama native's first experience traveling outside the United States, and he claimed that his two months abroad left a strong impression on him. Shannon writes, "I wandered to Mexico City to Vera Cruz and Taxco. It was a glorious adventure."[269] When Shannon described his trip, he suggested that it inspired his paintings of Alabama, rekindling his feelings for home: "I painted nothing [in Mexico] – but realized more strongly that this (Alabama) was the thing for me to paint – I seem to belong here."[270] This description was printed in conjunction with his exhibition "Paintings of the South," held at the Jacques Seligmann & Co. Gallery in Manhattan from May 9 to May 28, 1938.

Shannon's exhibition at Jacques Seligmann & Co. included 22 paintings, as well as a group of gouaches and drawings. Most of the paintings in the exhibition depicted

[269] Charles Shannon, "Paintings of the South," artist statement for exhibition held at Jacques Seligmann and Company, New York City, 1938. From the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts Artist File, Charles Shannon.

[270] Charles Shannon, "Paintings of the South," n.p.

African American subjects.[271] None of them depicted scenes from his recent trip to Mexico. The paintings included *Lonesome Road, Negro Spiritual*, *The Lover, After the Lynching, Saturday Ev'nin*,[272] and *Alabama Landscape*. In his artist statement, Shannon describes experiences from the time he spent living in a rural black community in Alabama (during his summer breaks from college), as if to defend the authenticity of his imagery:

> I worked with the Negroes in building my cabin for two months – cutting down trees (Comer on the other end of a cross-cut saw singing to its rhythm); snaking them with mules to the site of the cabin – building it. I went to their churches with them, to their dances and drank with them – I saw expressions of primitive souls. I came to love this land – the plants and people that grew from it.[273]

Saturday Ev'nin, painted in 1937, depicts four men walking together, their mouths open in laughter or song (Figure 68). All of them are dressed in colorful but simple clothing. Bright orange, blue, red, and green shirts offset their dark brown skin. Their feet are bare and extremely large. The landscape that surrounds them is painted in broad brush

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[271] At his gallerist's prodding, Shannon created a handful of works depicting white subjects to include in the exhibition. In a letter dated April 8, 1938, Rolf H. Waegen of Jacques Seligmann & Co. wrote to Shannon: "As I wrote you the other day, I have seen a number of the art critics of the magazines, as Vogue, Spur, Town and Country, etc. They are all willing to give us notices, however, we will find it difficult to have some of the paintings reproduced, which you can readily understand. Your style of painting has very little to do with fashion or vogue. Regarding now our conversation which we had sometime ago when you were here, we tried to impress upon you that it would be a good idea to have some white subjects in your exhibition. … I think that neither Mr. Seligmann nor I stressed this point in a sense of criticism or reproach but merely to help you as we have only one interest—to make a success of your exhibition and create a certain standing in the art world for you." Jacques Seligmann & Co. records, 1904-1978, bulk 1913-1974. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[272] Retitled *Saturday Night*. In the collection of the Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, Georgia.

[273] Charles Shannon, "Paintings of the South," n.p. Interestingly, Shannon's statement "I saw expressions of primitive souls" has been excised from its most recent publication. See Margaret Lynn Ausfeld's essay "Unlikely Survival: Bill Traylor's Drawings," in *Bill Traylor: Drawings from the Collections of the High Museum of Art and The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts* (New York: Delmonico Books, 2012), 12.

strokes; the sky and the ground are rendered in a fiery, expressive red. The men's faces are indistinguishable.

In *The Lover*, Shannon paints a man lying on the ground and burying his head in his hands (Figure 69). Behind him is the same kind of brushy growth that Shannon paints behind the figures in *Saturday Ev'nin*. However, the figure in *The Lover* is bathed in moonlight, and Shannon paints the scene in deep blues and purples. Again, the man's limbs are long, his hands and feet are unnaturally large, and his skin is painted in dark browns. Again, Shannon refrains from painting his subject's face. The boisterous, laughing, partying group of four figures is surrounded by bright, flashy reds and oranges. The lonely lover is surrounded by the blues. Neither painting includes any architectural structures. In both, Shannon connects his figures and their emotional states to the colors he uses to portray the landscapes around them.

Saturday Ev'nin and *The Lover* bear similarities to paintings being made by Thomas Hart Benton in the late 1920s. Benton, the foremost proponent of American Regionalism, had traveled through the South in 1926 and 1927, and he held an exhibition of his paintings of the region at the Delphic Studios in 1929. The exhibition was titled "The South," and it was divided into four sections: "King Cotton" (images of Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana), "The Lumber Camp," (West Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky), "Holy Roller Camp Meeting" (Cumberland Mountains), and "Coal Mines" (West Virginia).[274] Benton also recorded his recollections of his travels in his

[274] Henry Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton: An American Original* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 151.

1937 autobiography, *An Artist in America*.[275] The South he described was belligerent, proud, impoverished, and ill-educated—qualities that struck Benton as picturesque and amusing. Talking with a white overseer at a cotton plantation in Georgia, Benton observes: "He was grooved to ways which, though he deplored them, he couldn't escape," and he adds a dig at urban viewers: "I can imagine the scorn with which some of the cocksure social radicals of the big cities would regard him…"[276]

The subject of the South would occupy several of Benton's large scale projects in the 1930s, including his 1930-1931 mural *America Today* at the New School for Social Research which had a panel titled *Deep South*. In 1932, Benton painted a mural cycle called *Arts of Life in America* at the Whitney Museum; one of the panels of that mural project included *Arts of the South*, in which Benton depicted "a Holy Roller service, black singers, crapshooters, a mother feeding a baby, and a mule driver outside a church."[277] "Who knows the South?" he asks in his autobiography, "It is a land of beauty and horror, of cultivation and refinement, laid over misery and degradation. It is a land of tremendous contradictions. … In spite of the above, the South remains our romantic land."[278] In the panel *Arts of the South*, Benton paints a black male figure in the center of the composition (Figure 70). He clasps his hands together and looks up and out of the panel, his lips slightly open. He has large, bare feet, and his white pants are rolled up at

[275] Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America*, 4th revised edition (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983).

[276] Ibid., 163.

[277] Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton*, 186.

[278] Benton, *An Artist in America*, 198.

the bottom into cuffs. Like many of the white and black figures in Benton's paintings, this figure implies the labor of his daily life in his exaggerated musculature, and simple clothing. Benton's Americans are often marked by their hard work.

Shannon's paintings of African American figures constitute the majority of his artistic production. Like Benton, Shannon created murals and painted genre scenes of southern life. Unlike Benton, however, Shannon used black subjects primarily as indicators of emotional and spiritual experience, evidenced through expressionist color. Whereas Benton's paintings of the South are studies of labor's effects on various regional types (black and white)**,** the subject of Shannon's paintings is color—color of paint as it represented emotional experience, not color as it related to the body politic. Two small watercolor and gouache paintings by Shannon made circa 1939 show his experimentation with color to express what he would later call his "obsession" with "black soul."[279] In *Syncopation Number 1*, a preaching figure stands slightly off-center in the composition, one hand raised to the sky, the other holding open a book (Figure 71). His body is curved in movement, a sense which is reinforced by the curving forms of his flowing robes. Figures are drawn in all around him, but their features are indistinct; they are, rather, the blurred background to the expressive sermon. Behind the preacher's left shoulder, a large chapel window or door opens out onto a blue sky. The entire canvas is marked by thick brushstrokes of blue and purple paint, accented by lines of white or yellow. In *Syncopation Number 2*, Shannon paints figures in movement (Figure 72). They seem to

[279] Charles Shannon in an interview with Roger Ricco, 1989, unpublished typescript, Charles Shannon archive. See Josef Helfenstein, "Bill Traylor and Charles Shannon: A Historic Encounter in Montgomery," in *Deep Blues: Bill Traylor, 1854-1949,* 96-107 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 99.

be either dancing or participating in a revival or worship service. Again people surround the central figure that, in this case, clasps tightly to the figure in front of him. The two seem locked together. The surrounding figures raise their hands. Shannon's color palette has changed to warmer yellows, with purple, white, and black constituting the figures. "What I was attempting to express in paint was being nourished by my experiences," recalled Shannon in a 1989 interview:

> I lived close to [African Americans] in the country and heard them shout and sing in the fields. I went to their churches and felt the rhythm and surge of their meetings which somehow transformed agony into joyousness. In Montgomery, on weekends, I would get the latest record releases for Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, Fats Waller and many other great black artists.[280]

Shannon believed he had a rare familiarity with and knowledge of black Alabamans' experiences because of his summers spent in a black community and his love of black music—he believed himself to be a connoisseur of black culture.

Speaking in a 1989 interview, Shannon remarked upon his "obsession with what might be called 'black soul,'" describing that obsession as being inspired by music: spirituals, jazz, and hymns.[281] Shannon's use of the phrase "black soul" suggests an heuristic comparison between his representation of black figures in his paintings and W. E. B. Du Bois's influential 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk*, perhaps the most famous articulation of the idea of black soul. In the book, Du Bois writes about African American experience, especially in the rural South, as he observed it during several research trips

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[280] Ibid.

[281] Ibid.

and during his tenure as a professor at Atlanta University. His essays range from meditations on the music of spirituals to an agonized remembrance of his young son who died. In his essay entitled "Of the Sons of Master and Man," Du Bois outlines the places and ways in which blacks and whites in the South interact in "matters of everyday life."[282] He surveys interactions in neighborhoods and dwelling-places, in economic relations, in government and politics, in intellectual exchange (through conversation and reading), in public opinion, in religion, and in the social interactions that take place through travel, cultural events, and the practice of marriage, and he concludes, "Now if one notices carefully one will see that between these two worlds, despite much physical contact and daily intermingling, there is almost no community of intellectual life or point of transference where the thoughts and feelings of one race can come into direct contact and sympathy with the thoughts and feelings of the other."[283] Shannon's claims to be a connoisseur of black culture and "soul," indicate his attempt to understand the experiences of others: he could believe himself successful in this attempt because of his place of power as a white male in the South. Du Bois's study points to the fraught nature of Shannon's assumptions.[284]

One further similarity between Benton and Shannon's images of the South indicate their efforts to understand African American experiences in the region. In 1934,

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[282] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 161.

[283] Ibid., 177-178.

[284] There is a growing body of literature about white appropriation of black subject matter. See especially George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995) and Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Benton created a painting titled *A Lynching*, which he contributed to an exhibition organized by the NAACP, *An Art Commentary on Lynching*. In 1939, Shannon created a painting of Klansmen on their way to a lynching. Beneath them, a family hides underground, and waits for them to pass. Although a sketch for the painting is still extant, Shannon destroyed the finished painting. He later claimed that he did so because he feared retribution from Montgomery whites.[285] Benton's painting was destroyed by rain after he stored it in a leaky shed on Martha's Vineyard.[286] Both men claimed strong leftist politics early in their careers, and both men painted images of Southerners which monumentalized the figure of the Southern African American. And both men, whether intentionally or not, destroyed the single image they each made about a central trauma that defined relationships of power between whites and blacks in the South during the 1930s. Here is a moment in which both artists turn away from reaching an affective "point of transference," like what Du Bois describes.

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A third painter in the New South group, Crawford Gillis also made works about Southern subjects, in a style inflected by contemporary Mexican art. A blurry photograph taken in 1935 shows Gillis walking side by side with Lapsley in Manhattan (Figure 73). Like Lapsley, Gillis was from Selma, Alabama. Both men moved to New York in 1935 to study at the National Academy of Design. On the back of the photograph, text in

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[285] Mechal Sobel, *Painting a Hidden Life: The Art of Bill Traylor* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 129.

[286] Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton*, 251.

Lapsley's handwriting reads, "Walking down Lexington Avenue, October 23, 1935 after having interviewed Alma Reed. Portfolio under my arm." The photograph and its inscription provide the only documentation of Lapsley and Gillis's first meeting with Reed. The meeting was worth recording; Reed was a generous supporter of the arts and regularly showed works by Mexican artists at her Delphic Studios.[287] In January 1938, Reed curated an exhibition of Gillis's paintings at the Delphic Studios. The exhibition included paintings of Southern subjects, done in oil or watercolor, including *New Plows*, *Hardware Store*, *Corn*, *Cotton Pickers*, *Vaudeville Singers*, and *Heat*.[288]

Art historian and critic Jerome Klein reviewed Gillis's exhibition for the *New York Post*. Klein writes, "There is another study of Negro cotton pickers, swollen figures with horribly gnarled and twisted hands. … it's been done so much. But most every one had made such a pretty picture of it, and [Gillis] had to show that he had never been able to find that picture."[289] Klein continues, emphasizing Gillis's connection to his subjects:

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[287] It is important to note here that Reed also regularly showed work by artists who were regularly excluded from most museums and galleries. For example, in 1935, she lent her support to an exhibition of paintings by Malvin Gray Johnson and sculptures by Richmond Barthé and Sargent Johnson, and she was involved in the corresponding publication, *Negro Artists: An Illustrated Review of Their Achievements*, 1935 (New York: Harmon Foundation and Delphic Studios. Reprinted, 1976).

[288] Unfortunately, most of these paintings are now lost or in private collections.

[289] Jerome Klein, "Artist Finds it Tough in the Land of Cotton," *New York Post*, January 8, 1938. Klein was also owner of the Downtown Gallery in New York. He was a speaker at the 2nd American Artists' Congress 1937 in New York, N.Y., a symposium held Jan. 13, 1937 at the Museum of Modern Art. The speakers included Walter Quirt, Salvador Dali, Meyer Schapiro, Klein, and Richard Huelsenbeck. Klein was also one of the participants at the famous, informal gathering of art scholars organized by Schapiro around 1935 that included Robert Goldwater, Alfred Barr, Erwin Panofsky, James Johnson Sweeny and occasionally Lewis Mumford. http://www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org/kleinj.htm Accessed 23 May 2012.

"He is not a folk artist. I would say rather he has the makings of a *people's artist*, with unusual sympathetic insight."[290]

Art critic Paul Bird reviewed Gillis's exhibition for *Art Digest* in January 1938. In his review, Bird describes the artist's working process:

> The framework of this tale is becoming familiar. Crawford Gillis, a Negro, works in a radio shop in Selma, Alabama. He has never had any instruction, but he likes to paint. Buys bedding material, sizes it, calls it canvas. Then paints. No one will sit for him, so much of the work is done looking out of his window Sundays. Paints poor whites and Negroes—paints the oppressed. No one in Selma even knows he paints. Manages somehow to get his paintings to New York to a one-man show. … Gillis must be the fourth or fifth such case this season.[291]

Bird's description is mysterious. Gillis painted on canvas and he had artistic training. Many people in Selma knew he was a painter. Selma locals were proud of the town's tradition of contributing to art: Clara Weaver Parrish, a painter and Tiffany glass designer, and Richard Coe, a printmaker, were both beloved professional artists from Gillis's hometown. Gillis "managed" to get his paintings to New York through the support of one of the city's famous arts patrons. And Gillis was white.

Although incorrect on most counts, Paul Bird's review of Gillis's show conveys some of the assumptions viewers made about Gillis' images of the Deep South. The fact that Gillis was exhibiting at a venue that regularly showed work by Mexican and African American artists may have allowed for some of these assumptions. Viewers may have considered Alabama's agricultural economy with the same kind of pre-industrial fantasy

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[290] Ibid. Emphasis mine.

[291] Paul Bird, "The Fortnight in New York," *Art Digest* 12, no. 15 (Jan. 1938): 22. Paul Bird was a New York art critic in the 1930s and 1940s who wrote a regular column for *Art Digest* called "The Fortnight in New York" in which he surveyed the current gallery and museum shows.

that many Americans possessed about Mexico. Gillis' paintings of farming implements, corn, and black laborers ignited a flight of fancy for Paul Bird which resulted in his development of a racialized creation myth about them. What is particularly striking in Bird's review is how his interpretation of the paintings leads him to assume that the painter was African American. In the review, Bird observes that Gillis's show "must be the fourth or fifth such case this season," though he does not specify which other exhibitions precede Gillis's, or what he means by "such [a] case."[292] This assertion seems based upon his incorrect assumptions about Gillis' race, and his belief that Gillis was a self-taught artist. It is possible Bird was referring in part to the Museum of Modern Art's October 1937 exhibition of work by self-taught sculptor William Edmondson. Edmondson, also from the South, received extensive press coverage when his exhibition opened; Bird includes the exhibition in his "Fortnight in New York" column for the November 1, 1937 edition of *Art Digest*. When the Edmondson exhibition opened, *The New York Times* featured three photographs of Edmondson and his work: a sculpture of a preacher, a carving of an angel, and a photograph of the artist working at his home in Nashville (Figure 74).[293] The presentation of Edmondson's work at the Museum of Modern Art was part of a broader set of problematic suppositions about African and African American art and its role as a source from which white modern artists could

[292] Ibid.

[293]The *Times* story (in contrast to Bird's article) emphasizes the rarity of an exhibition of work by black artists: "One man exhibitions of the work of even trained Negro painters and sculptors are a rarity in New York galleries, and none has ever been held at the Museum of Modern Art," the writer notes. "Modern Museum to Show Negro Art," *The New York Times*, October 9, 1937.

draw. Edmondson (and later, Traylor) were framed by institutions as uneducated outsiders, whose images represented some kind of authentic blackness.

Bird's assumption that Gillis was black indicates the overlap of Gillis's aesthetic with Bird's assumptions about racialized experience. For a member of the New York art world, images of the South were interwoven with news stories and photographs which emphasized "the problem of the color line," to borrow Du Bois's phrase. Linking Gillis's images with the artist's racial identity—and inferring that he must be black—sets up a different set of meanings for the paintings. As art historian Jacqueline Francis writes:

> …many exhibition reviewers—white and nonwhite alike—confidently asserted that the artists' racial positions were self-evident in their themes and practices. … Modernism, as a diverse suite of formal artistic practices that generally veered away from naturalism, depended on embodied identities that operated around essentializing ideas of the foreign and the primitive.[294]

What it meant to be a black painter in the South painting black figures in the South was different than what it meant to be a white painter in the South painting black figures in the South: Bird's assumption that Gillis was black implies that a black artist could create more authentic images of black experience. It also indicates that the style of Gillis's paintings was considered to be the style of a self-taught artist—by extension, it indicates that the critic presumed that being self-taught was an indication of the artist's race. Bird's assumption also sidesteps the question of interracial interpretation. That is, if Bird had correctly determined Gillis's race, he would have had to approach the same question that

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[294] Jacqueline Francis, *Making Race: Modernism and "Racial Art" in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 7-8. In a future iteration of this project, I look forward to expanding upon the connections between early formulations of modernism (especially as they relied upon racial stereotypes and ideas about primitiveness) and the simultaneous construction of popular images representing the South.

Du Bois posed for himself in "Of the Sons of Master and Man": how could a white man understand black experience? And how might that "understanding" be fraught, even laden with misunderstanding? It was, critically, easier to decide that a black artist was representing black working class experience in the South. Such an assumption lays the burden of representation upon the black artist. The stereotype is worth pointing out because it influences Bird's article, but it also relates to a broader set of suppositions about race and region which were not unique to Bird, but which were foundational to ideas about modern art and which would determine popular ideas about the South throughout the 20th century.

The art exhibited at Alma Reed's salon was connected to a liberal political stance; the political program of the gallery dovetailed with the leftist politics of Mexican artists such as Orozco, who regularly exhibited there.[295] Many leftists in the art world of the early 1930s were fascinated by African American culture and actively lobbied against the oppression and violent attacks upon African Americans in the South. Orozco's early graphic work shows his interest in African American culture. His first lithograph, made in 1928, is called *Vaudeville, Harlem N.Y.* and it depicts an acrobatic performance and a theater full of audience members in Harlem at the height of the Harlem Renaissance.[296]

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[295] Alma Reed, with her friend Eva Palmer Sikelianos, hosted a regular forum for intellectuals and artists. Some of these included, Demetrios Kalimacos, poet Angelo Sikelianos, Sarojini Naidu, Dutch poet Leonard Charles Van Noppen, French author Henri Barbusse, Lebanese poet Kahlil Gibran, and American novelist (from Charleston, South Carolina) Julia Peterkin. For more on the Delphic Studio, see Jacqueline Barnitz, "Orozco's 'Delphic' Years," unpublished typescript in author's possession.

[296] Art historian John Ittmann writes that this print shows Orozco's frustration with the vogue for Mexican-themed works in the United States. John Ittmann, ed. *Mexico and Modern Printmaking: A Revolution in the Graphic Arts, 1920 to 1950* (2006), 126-143. Ittmann cites a letter Orozco wrote to Jean Charlot dated

Between 1933 and 1934, Orozco produced a lithograph entitled *Negros colgados* (Hanged Black Men), which shows four black figures hanging from a tree, a raging fire beneath them (Figure 75). Orozco would later write about the decade: "The whole world is shaken and bloodied by racial hate."[297] When he exhibited at Reed's Delphic Studios, then, Gillis was positioning himself within a discourse that had overlapping interests in African American art, culture, and experience and contemporary Mexican art and politics—both of which were marked by their relationships to oppressive racial caste systems. When Bird assumes that Gillis is black, he infers Gillis's race not just because he believes a black artist more likely to make images which reflected upon black life in an empathetic manner, but because he believed that white artists from the South were unlikely to do so. The racial classification Bird imagines indicates his construction of a fantasy about the South—one supported by news stories and photographs—which allows for rigid belief systems and experiences for Southern blacks and whites based foremost upon their constructions of race.

February 23, 1928, in which he describes the current "mode de Mexique" as a "farce" and of wanting to wait until "the 'Mexicanist' storm blows over." See also Orozco, *The Artist in New York*, 40-41.

[297] Orozco, *The Artist in New York*, 40-41.

CORN AND COTTON

In the summer of 1939, the New South held its second exhibition, *The Growth of Corn*. The exhibition charted the development of corn from seed to harvest, using real corn kernels (which were rubber-cemented to the wall), plants, stalks, and ears. In the center of the gallery hung an enormous *papier-mâché* sun, so large it barely fit through the doors of the gallery. On a small table, visitors could find texts about agriculture.[298]

The decision of the New South members to make an exhibition about agriculture reaffirms the group's understanding of itself in relation to the region's larger issues. In the New South manifesto, written in early 1939, the group notes the prevalence of "movements toward preventing the erosion of our soil, [and] preventing the waste of our natural resources…"[299] The manifesto contrasts the relative isolation of cultural projects in the South with government initiatives to modernize farming and to preserve viable natural resources in the region. Agriculture was the dominant issue in Alabama; the front page headlines of *The Montgomery Advertiser* in the late 1930s were most frequently related to farming issues.[300] The New South's manifesto associates these agricultural changes with a "forward force" and identifies the group's cultural projects with a similar

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[298] New South member Jean Lewis describes this exhibition in an unpublished interview with Miriam Rogers Fowler. Copy of the interview is in the author's possession.

[299] Unpublished New South manifesto, 1939. From the Marcia Weber archives at the University of Auburn at Montgomery.

[300] This changed in September 1939, when the paper shifted its front page focus to the war in Europe.

movement forward.[301] That is, the group drew connections between its idea of an artistic avant-garde and the rural agricultural developments taking place in the 1930s—the *Growth of Corn* show was the clearest articulation of this connection.

When they decided to create an exhibition about corn, the New South group was taking a side in a longstanding agricultural and political debate, which pitched corn against cotton. In the 1930s, corn and cotton represented two competing worldviews. With its historical roots in the antebellum South and the human rights abuses of slavery, cotton represented the Old South. In contrast, government agencies including the Farm Security Administration encouraged farmers to plant corn, making it a political and economic symbol for the future. By creating an exhibition about corn, the New South members associated themselves with optimism about change in the region, and predicted a more progressive future for their state. After Reconstruction, farmers in Alabama adopted a single-staple sharecropping system, in which they farmed only cotton.[302] This led to a surplus of cotton, and, as a result, farmers were paid very little for their crop, and they were left with no locally sustainable food harvest. In 1910, a boll weevil epidemic shook the fragile cotton economy further, and, as a result, Alabama farmers began to diversify their crops by planting peach, pear, and apple orchards, peanuts, and hay and by

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[301] This assertion of "momentum" and forward movement stands in stark contrast to prevalent art historical studies that link regional projects with conservatism, nostalgia for the past, and the privileging of experiences related to one's local community over those of the isolated, urban individual.

[302] For additional information about Alabama agriculture in the era of the Great Depression, see Charles S. Davis, *The Cotton Kingdom in Alabama* (Montgomery: Alabama State Department of Archives and History, 1939) and Herman Clarence Nixon, *Forty Acres and Steel Mules* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938).

raising livestock.[303] After World War I, cotton once again became the best money crop for the state, and again local farmers turned to cotton as their primary crop. The WPA Guide to 1930s Alabama describes cotton's long-standing influence:

> Cotton built railroads, steamboats, and fine mansions. Cotton stratified society, enabling the wealthier planters to live with a grace and leisure seldom equaled in history, but keeping the small farmers in poverty and ignorance. Even today, when crop diversification, manufacturing, and mining are making powerful inroads on its old supremacy, cotton still dictates the lives, the work, the very thoughts of thousands of people in Alabama.[304]

The stock market crash of 1929 had a substantial impact upon Alabama's agricultural production. Cotton hit an all-time low price (in 1929, cotton averaged 29 cents per pound, and by 1933 farmers could expect only about 6 cents per pound), and corn became the major crop for a majority of Alabama farmers; by 1935 there were 1.5 million more acres of corn than cotton farmed in the state.[305] The exhibition aligned the group with New Deal agricultural policies and with national art programs that promoted U.S. pride in its home-grown food products. In Alabama, the Farm Security Administration encouraged crop diversification and the protection of arable land from erosion and over-use. Corn was an important food staple—for people and for livestock—and it had historically been grown in Alabama. To grow corn, then, was to grow a food crop rather than a cash crop. Walker Evans referenced the state's agricultural debate in a 1935 photograph taken in

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[303] Writer's Program of the Works Progress Administration, *Alabama: A Guide to the Deep South* (subsequently retitled *The WPA Guide to 1930s Alabama*) (New York: R. R. Smith, 1941), 74.

[304] Ibid.

[305] David Brown and Clive Webb, *Race in the American South: From Slavery to Civil Rights* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 242. See also Writer's Program, *Alabama: A Guide to the Deep South* (New York: R. R. Smith, 1941).

Alabama (Figure 76). The photograph shows a row of corn in the foreground, the tall stalks reaching into the sky and blocking (or framing) a view of a cotton field behind it.

Corn was also associated with national identity in the 1930s, and New Deal-era murals throughout the South and the Midwest are filled with wholesome farming families and fields of corn and wheat.[306] A 1938 mural painted by Lowell Houser in the post office in Ames, Iowa, is entitled *Evolution of Corn* (Figure 77). Like the New South "Growth of Corn" exhibition, Houser's mural traces the development of corn from germination to harvest. The mural also lays out a historical trajectory for corn, which begins in Mexico: on the left side of the mural, a young Maya Indian plants the corn while a god sits behind him holding corn plants in a pot marked by the hieroglyph for maize. On the right side of the mural, the corn is harvested by an Anglo-American farmer wearing overalls and boots. Behind the farmer Houser painted a large microscope and a chart of scientific elements required for photosynthesis. The mural is divided into its two sides by an ear of corn, over which the artist superimposed a corn stalk and a seed embryo. Here Houser associates corn with the traditions and religion of native peoples of the Americas *and* with modern farming and science in the United States.

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[306] For example, in his 1932-1934 mural cycle at Dartmouth College, José Clemente Orozco painted Maya Indians farming corn in a panel entitled *Pre-Conquest Golden Age*, thereby associating the crop with an idyllic indigenous past. For an image of this panel, see Laurance P. Hurlburt, *The Mexican Muralists in the United States* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 66.

There is a large body of publications about Depression-era murals. For images of the kinds of murals I describe here, see: Sue Bridwell Beckham, *Depression Post Office Murals and Southern Culture: A Gentle Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989); John C. Carlisle, *A Simple and Vital Design: The Story of the Indiana Post Office Murals* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1995); Anita Price Davis, *New Deal Art in North Carolina: The Murals, Sculptures, Reliefs, Paintings, Oils and Frescoes and Their Creators* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2009); Laurance P. Hurlburt, *The Mexican Muralists in the United States* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989); and Karal Ann Marling, *Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post-Office Murals in the Great Depression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

The New South's exhibition about corn came at a time when corn represented a new alternative to Alabama's historical reliance upon cotton. With *The Growth of Corn,* the New South members celebrated cotton's competitor, extolling the production of a food crop and the recent changes to the state's agriculture industry.

Corn also connected the group to the state's indigenous history, which was being celebrated in the local media with the opening in May 1939—two months before *Growth of Corn*—of the Mound State Monument, in Moundville, Alabama.[307] Located 70 miles from Selma and 115 miles from Montgomery, the Mound State Monument was constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a New Deal organization which hired young men to work on large scale landscape and building projects, including many that participated in the agricultural programs of the FSA. The Monument included a museum displaying a burial site and artifacts from the Mississippian people who inhabited the area around A.D. 1200.[308] More than 600 people attended the Moundville opening ceremonies, which included a "reenactment" of the building of the mound, performed by local schoolchildren who carried tin pails full of dirt.[309] The opening festivities were described in the *Tuscaloosa News, The Birmingham News,* and *The Montgomery Advertiser.* An article in the *Tuscaloosa News* indicates the artificiality of the monument's landscaping:

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[307] For a discussion of the development and conservation of Mound State Monument, see Ellen Garrison, "Walter B. Jones and Moundville," *Alabama Heritage* (Summer 2001): 6-17.

[308] The Civilian Conservation Corps built the museum and completed extensive landscaping and erosion prevention in the area.

[309] Robert G. Pasquill, *The Civilian Conservation Corps in Alabama, 1933-1942: A Great and Lasting Good* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 165.

> wonderful work has been done by the [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp members, such as sodding the mounds to prevent erosion and restoring them in their former build, planting flowering shrubs in the ravines, building little rustic bridges which connect the spots of beauty, erecting tables and chairs for the many people which have picnics there, building a museum to house the relics and artifacts found in the mounds, and many other things worthy of praise.[310]

"Little rustic bridges" to facilitate picnicking were only part of the illusion. "Indian" mannequins arranged in elaborate tableaux showed the creative flourishes of the monument's curators in re-imagining native life in Alabama.

Moundville's restoration became an important site for the ongoing corn and cotton debate. A 1929 photograph shows one of the mounds covered with crops of both corn and cotton, illustrating the prevalence of both crops in the local landscape before the restoration began.[311] As part of the restoration, however, the CCC plowed over the cotton and, in some instances, replaced it with corn, which was considered a more historically accurate crop.[312] The Old South's plantation crop, then, was replaced to emphasize an earlier, pre-slavery historical moment, one in which the local landscape was inhabited by indigenous peoples. Plowing over the cotton was also an indication of the CCC's involvement in government agricultural initiatives of the moment.

In its previous and later exhibitions, the New South included figural paintings by Shannon, Lapsley, and Gillis. In *The Growth of Corn*, however, the only figures inhabiting the agricultural picture created by the New South were the volunteers who

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[310] *Tuscaloosa News*, April 3, 1939.

[311] Garrison, "Walter B. Jones and Moundville," 10.

[312] Writer's Program, *Alabama: A Guide to the Deep South* (subsequently retitled *The WPA Guide to 1930s Alabama*) (New York: R. R. Smith, 1941), 312.

worked in the exhibition space for a combined 60 hours a week. New South members involved with the exhibition remember it as being a fun project; they laughed as they built the *papier-mâché* sun and then struggled to cram it through the gallery doors. Jean Lewis recalled the difficulty of scraping rubber cement from the gallery walls. As they collaboratively and imaginatively charted the growth of corn, from seed to harvest, the New South members became participants in a fantasy agricultural process. Taking their cues from work done by Mexican artists, the New South connected the politics of their artistic community to the images they constructed of indigenous life in Alabama.

A PEOPLE'S ARTIST

Ideas about indigeneity and rural life informed the New South's February 1940 exhibition of works by Bill Traylor, entitled "Bill Traylor: People's Artist."[313] The exhibition consisted of approximately 100 of Traylor's drawings and paintings on paper and cardboard, unframed and tacked directly to the wall. A photograph of the installation shows twenty works of varying sizes and on various types of paper, arranged salon style on two of the gallery walls (Figure 78). The organizers of the exhibition printed a small exhibition pamphlet for the occasion. In it, they divide Traylor's work into a total of 12 categories:

A. BASKETS

B. FIGURES
   Individual Characterizations (including self-portrait at lower left)

C. FANTASTIC DESIGNS
   based on human forms

D. STORY TELLING COMPOSITIONS AND HOUSES
   Hunting scenes, drinking bouts, chicken scrapes, blacksmith shop, runaway horse

E. SIMPLE SHAPES AND INTRICATE COMPOSITIONS – CONTRASTED

F. POSTER

G. FIGURES
   Individual Characterizations

[313] Although the exhibition is cited in all of the literature about the New South and about Charles Shannon, and it is frequently mentioned in literature about Bill Traylor, to date no scholar has ever discussed the exhibition, its organization, or its exhibition pamphlet in any detail, or in relation to other New South projects.

H. FIGURES AS ABSTRACT DESIGN
(little thought to character)

I. ANIMALS

J. SYMBOLS
(including preacher and congregation; crucifixion)

K. UTENSILS

L. WILD AFRICAN PEOPLE AND ANIMALS

Another photograph of the exhibition shows ten works hanging above a small table (Figure 79). On the table are a typewriter, mug, and papers. The curators' organizational category for this section was apparently ANIMALS, since in this photograph we see Traylor's images of an elephant, turtles, cattle, and a man riding a horse, among other creatures.

The New South's taxonomy of Traylor's work includes ostensibly objective designations: animals, utensils, baskets. Other categories show more clearly the way the New South members viewed the works: "(little thought to character)" modifies the "FIGURES AS ABSTRACT DESIGN" category, and another grouping of people and animals is described as "WILD" and "AFRICAN." The categories illuminate some of the New South's developing narratives about Traylor. Category M—STORY TELLING COMPOSITIONS AND HOUSES—includes "Hunting scenes, drinking bouts, chicken scrapes, blacksmith shop, runaway horse," and it suggests a specific narrative use for the images. According to Charles Shannon, Traylor often told stories while he painted, describing the comic antics of the figures in his images, but the brochure does not include

any indication of what the stories were. The New South's impulse to classify Traylor's work according to clear categories, with themes ("hunting scenes") or specific figure types ("preacher and congregation"), suggests their uneasy attempts to translate the images, which were ultimately ambiguous to them. Art historian Mechal Sobel has argued that Traylor deliberately made his images using a visual vocabulary that Southern white people would find confusing and Southern black people would understand. Sobel connects Traylor's images to traditions of African conjure and Southern black fraternities:

> …in 1939, Bill Traylor found that the drawings, which shouted out his rage, did not call down whites' wrath, but rather their approval. When he realized that they did not know what he was saying, or that they would turn a blind eye toward his message or even enter into an unspoken alliance supporting it...[he] could display his most radical work for all to see."[314]

Sobel is also the first historian to publish an account of Traylor's life that differs dramatically from Shannon's version. Her research, which included interviews with members of the rural black community where Traylor lived before moving to Montgomery, offers evidence of Traylor's personal life. She traces police accounts of the lynching of Traylor's son, Will Traylor, in 1929, which Traylor never mentioned to Shannon, and Traylor's family never discussed amongst themselves, to suggest one of many reasons why Traylor may have turned to magical or even angry image-making.[315] Writing about Traylor's images of dogs, for example, like those included in the New

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[314] Mechal Sobel, *Painting a Hidden Life: The Art of Bill Traylor* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 129.

[315] Ibid., 72.

South's category of ANIMALS, Sobel argues: "A traditional Kongo power object or container of sacred medicine was often constructed in the shape of a black, male dog, 'which signifies aggressive intent by its bared teeth'…Traylor's giant dogs…suggest a leashed threat against whites, with blacks holding the leashes."[316] Sobel is the first to insist that the New South had no way to understand or interpret Traylor's images—that Traylor coded his images for his black audience.

When "Bill Traylor: People's Artist" opened, Shannon brought Traylor to see the exhibition. He led the elderly Traylor up two flights of stairs to see his work hung on the gallery walls. Shannon writes, "[Traylor] studied each picture carefully and chuckled as he pointed with his cane to the many things that amused him. But it was as if he had not drawn them—in no way did he acknowledge his authorship and after that day he never referred to his exhibition again."[317] In contrast to his volubility on Monroe Street, Traylor's silence when he visited the exhibition indicates that the New South was not the context in which he considered his works to have a narrative. Traylor's seeming refusal to acknowledge his authorship of the images could easily have been a necessary measure of self-protection.

Sobel's study of Traylor's life and works differs markedly from observations made by writers in the 1940s up to the present day, who have struggled to find formal and narrative resonances between Traylor's imagery and their ideas of what rural life on a plantation must have been like. "Today, the walls of the 'New South,' in a room three

316 Ibid., 100-101.

317 Charles Shannon, "Bill Traylor's Triumph," *Art & Antiques* (February 1988): 64.

flights up on Lower Commerce Street, are literally staring with grotesque, spread-winged fowl of an almost surrealistic barnyard; and leaping at every corner with Traylor's versions of chicken stealing, 'possum hunting, and downright hand to hand fighting on his highly imaginative plantation," writes the unnamed author of a 1940 article in *The Montgomery Advertiser* titled "The Enigma of Uncle Bill Traylor."[318] Writing for an exhibition catalog of Traylor's work in 1999, curator Roman Kurzmeyer states, "[Traylor's] work reflects a deeply rural conception of life."[319] And, in the same catalog, Peter Morrin writes:

> [Traylor's] reliance on measurement and the constructive sensibility of his compositions—as well as his own drawings of buildings—suggest that carpentry and building may have been in his past. We know he reported being a pole man on a surveying team. The theme of balance—how something stands upright—is a constant preoccupation in Traylor's inventions. A hand on a small plantation would have to be a *bricoleur*, a master simultaneously of wide array of skills. The distribution of physical weight in loading a horse wagon, carrying a heavy load on one's back, or framing a house may have provided Traylor with a habit of mind that translated into the calculation of visual weights and balances.[320]

Sobel's view of Traylor's agency also contrasts with the way Charles Shannon described Traylor. Shannon's texts, which have been extensively republished and repeated by later authors, posit a discovery narrative, with Traylor as local primitive who had joyfully discovered image-making late in his life. In his story, Shannon insists that he happened to find Traylor on the first day he began to make his drawings:

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[318] "The Enigma of Uncle Bill Traylor," *The Montgomery Advertiser*, March 31, 1940.

[319] Roman Kurzmeyer, "Plow and Pencil," in Helfenstein and Kurzmeyer, *Deep Blues*, 11.

[320] Peter Morrin, "Bill Traylor: Artist-Bricoleur," in Helfenstein and Kurzmeyer, *Deep Blues*, 32.

> One Saturday morning, in the early summer of 1939, an old black man was sitting on a box by the fence in front of the blacksmith shop. He had a white beard and was hunched over like he might be drawing. Walking closer, I could see that he held a stub of a pencil and was ruling clean straight lines on a piece of cardboard, using a short stick for a straightedge. He was deeply engrossed in what he was doing and I later discovered he was experiencing making marks on paper for the first time.[321]

After this "discovery," Shannon brought Traylor art supplies, medicine, and food, and he bought many of his drawings and paintings.

Shannon also photographed Traylor at work, as did New South members George and Jean Lewis.[322] In his photographs, Shannon captures a vibrant culture on Monroe Street, and he shows Traylor surrounded by people who gathered to hear his stories and watch him paint. All around him, Traylor has propped his images against the building's wall and along the street curb, creating an informal exhibition space right in the heart of his neighborhood. Shannon's photographs likely served as the basis for Shannon's 1940 mural depicting Traylor at work, which he painted for the occasion of Traylor's exhibition at the New South.[323] In a 1988 article, Shannon writes, "[Traylor] hung his pictures on the fence behind him with little loops of string – making a sidewalk exhibit.

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[321] Shannon, "Bill Traylor's Triumph," 61.

[322] Art historian Jordana Mendelson has written that both photography and folk art were understood to be authentic, documentary expressions of American experience in the 1930s. She writes, "Modernist critics who praised photography and folk art in the early twentieth century embraced the intuitive, automatic qualities of both as well as their potential as sources or alternatives to dominant art making styles and traditions." Jordana Mendelson, "'Craftsman Discovered by Photographer': Authenticity and American Art in the Twentieth Century," in *Bill Traylor, William Edmondson, and the Modernist Impulse*, ed. Josef Helfenstein and Roxanne Stanulis (Champaign: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2004), 107.

[323] The mural was later destroyed but a small preparatory sketch and a photograph of Shannon working on it still exist; my discussion of the mural is based upon these images. Copies of these may be found in the archives of the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts.

Passersby stopped to enjoy and occasionally buy his work."[324] Montgomery's Monroe Street African American community viewed Traylor's work daily; they constituted the original (and, for Traylor, the *primary*) audience for the work. Despite this public exhibition of Traylor's work on Monroe Street, the New South exhibition is repeatedly considered the first showing of Traylor's work: "New South is proud to have on its walls the first exhibition of the works of Bill Traylor," proclaims the "Bill Traylor: People's Artist" exhibition pamphlet. Curator Josef Helfenstein writes, "Six months after their first meeting, Shannon organized the first exhibition of Traylor's drawings..."[325] And Alabama historian Maridith Walker writes, "New South was located in old cotton-sampling rooms on the third floor of a downtown building, and it was here that Bill Traylor's first exhibition was mounted."[326] She adds, "The New South show introduced Traylor to Montgomery…" That New South members and subsequent writers did not consider Monroe Street an exhibition space indicates an enormous blind spot in their approach and in their ideas about what an exhibition is, in terms of audience, type of exhibition space, and accompanying text. In a sense, the New South enacted the same

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[324] Shannon, "Bill Traylor's Triumph," 65.

[325] Josef Helfenstein, "Bill Traylor and Charles Shannon: A Historic Encounter in Montgomery," in *Deep Blues: Bill Traylor, 1854-1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 101. Helfenstein also acknowledges the way in which the New South forced Traylor's work into the context of modern art: "The question, who actually created meaning for Edmondson's sculptures and Traylor's drawings, is crucial, since both artists' work was catapulted into a context virtually unknown to black artists in that period. Meaning was created first by those who discovered the work and decided to show it in the framework of modern art: white artists, white photographers, white curators, and later on white critics and white collectors." See Josef Helfenstein, "From the Sidewalk to the Marketplace: Traylor, Edmondson, and the Modernist Impulse," in *Bill Traylor, William Edmondson, and the Modernist Impulse*, ed. Josef Helfenstein and Roxanne Stanulis (Urbana: Krannert Art Museum and Kinkead Pavilion, 2004), 64.

[326] Maridith Walker, "Bill Traylor: Freed Slave and Folk Artist," *Alabama Heritage*, no. 14 (Fall 1989): 23.

kind of racialized imagination about Traylor and his work that Gillis and Shannon were the subjects of when they showed their paintings in New York: by removing the work from its Monroe Street context, New South members invented narratives about why Traylor made the work he did and what it meant. In retrospect, the New South's exhibition of Traylor's work and Sobel's counter to the Shannon narrative both point to the profound absence of knowledge—the way in which Traylor's life and work resists our knowing about him or the affective range of his imagery. Whether he was angry or accepting of his daily experiences, whether his work was coded for black audiences or challenged white supremacy, it is impossible to know. The work resists deciphering.

The title of the Traylor exhibition—"Bill Traylor: People's Artist"—may have been an allusion to Traylor's role in his community. It certainly seems to refer to Cahill's essay in the *Masters of Popular Painting* catalogue, entitled "Artists of the People." And it is the same term Jerome Klein used to describe Crawford Gillis's work. But "People's Artist," when seen in relation to the narratives Shannon developed around Traylor, suggests Traylor's people were the members of the New South, not the people who were part of Traylor's community on Monroe Street. Traylor became, for New South members, an artist who represented the possibilities for artistic creativity and Modern art, and who embodied liberal white Montgomerians' affective connection to Alabama's African American populations. The New South members' interpretations of Traylor's work from a perspective of white Southern liberal subjectivity indicates a different way of being and thinking from within the racial hierarchy of the South during these years. The New South members' intentions were good, but they also indicate some important

things about the complexities of interracial understanding in the South. In the 1920s and 1930s, "Black and white southerners engaged in constant and nuanced interactions, moderated by personal ties, economic interests, and class and gender dynamics and marked by cultural exchange," writes historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall.[327] And yet, the New South members interpreted Traylor's work from their locations of privilege and power—power maintained by other white Southerners through violence against blacks. This remains the dividing line they could not cross to understand Traylor's imagery, even as they tried to imagine a more liberal future marked by exchange between black and white Southerners.

[327] Hall, "Long Civil Rights Movement," 1243.

CONCLUSION

Building the House of the Future:

Places with a Past, Charleston, 1991

> We cannot settle for simple dichotomies (especially those that pit race against class, race-targeted against universalistic remedies, and so-called identity politics against economic policy and unionization), no matter how seductive they might be. Finally, we must forego easy closure and satisfying upward or downward arcs.[328]
>
> - JACQUELYN DOWD HALL, "THE LONG CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT"

In late spring of 1991, the annual Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina sponsored a city-wide exhibition of site-specific works in 19 locations. Curated by Mary Jane Jacob, the exhibition was called *Places with a Past*, and the 23 artists in the show were diverse in their ages, ethnic backgrounds, levels of experience, and origins. Established figures such as Christian Boltanski, Chris Burden, David Hammons, Ann Hamilton, Lorna Simpson, and Cindy Sherman participated, as did several emerging artists including Ronald Jones, Narelle Jubelin and Elizabeth Newman. Reviewing the exhibition, curator Lynne Cooke writes, "What constitutes the 'past' of the exhibition's title was interpreted as encompassing the economic, social, and cultural history of Charleston, manifested in issues such as warfare, slavery, class, sexuality, race, gender, religion, and labour."[329] Several of the artists created new images of events and battles of the Civil War. Others took personal interactions as their historical material. As one of the

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[328] Hall, " Long Civil Rights Movement," 1263.

[329] Lynne Cooke, "Places with a Past, Charleston, South Carolina," *The Burlington Magazine* 133, no. 1061 (August 1991): 573.

largest exhibitions of site-specific installations in the United States to that date, *Places with a Past* has subsequently served as a case study for books and articles about site-specific art, public art, and installation. It also established a precedent for subsequent curatorial projects that pair local and non-local artists with historically resonant sites, such as the Prospect 1 Biennial in New Orleans.

For *Places of the Past*, New York- and Rome-based conceptual artist David Hammons selected two vacant lots situated opposite from one another on the corners of America Street and Reid Street, in the black residential neighborhood of East Side. In one lot, he constructed a small park, using paving stones to outline a pathway that cut diagonally through a plot of sod he had laid there (Figure 80). In the same lot, he erected a 40-foot-tall flagpole, and at the top he placed an American flag modified to include the black, red, and green of the Black Nationalist flag. Also in the park, Hammons enlarged a photograph he took of neighborhood children posing as if they were looking up at the flag, and he printed the photograph on a small billboard. Nearby, a member of the neighborhood placed a small plaque engraved with a statement by Muhammed Armlya Nu'Man entitled "What Will Save America?" The statement, about class structure and its effects on education, includes a comment about time: "If the minds of the present world leaders are not ready to accept that they are moving against the time and that Almighty God is against them, it will not be long before they will be destroyed. The clock is ticking out."[330]

[330] Text quoted from Muhammed Armlya Nu'Man, *Wisdom from the West* (Jersey City**:** New Mind Productions, 1989).

In the opposite vacant lot, Hammons built a two-story, house-like structure (Figure 81). At approximately 6 feet wide and 20 feet long, the structure was pieced together with found materials, and it referenced local domestic architecture in its materials and style. With this structure, Hammons parodied the tradition of preservation tourism—a strong presence in Charleston since the 1920s—which relies upon superlatives such as "the oldest," or "the largest," to indicate historical importance and often to occlude events of real historical importance. Here Hammons constructed the narrowest house in the city. In his review of *Places with a Past*, New York Times writer Michael Brenson described the building as "amazingly eccentric, barely functional," and as "an inspired and unpredictable communal invention."[331] Members of the local community, who worked with Hammons to build the house, selected a name for the building: they titled it *House of the Future*. As the title indicates, a relationship to time animates Hammons's project. Critics and art historians have described this relationship as a tension between past and future, between one history and many histories.[332] Curator and art historian Paul Hoover writes, "If this half-painted, weather-beaten house is the house of the future, what future people will live in it? Or is it in fact the house of the past?"[333]

In my introduction, I described another domestic project which took past and future as its terms of investigation. In her drawing-room paintings, Josephine Crawford

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331 Michael Brenson, "Visual Arts Join Spoleto Festival U.S.A.," *The New York Times*, May 27, 1991.

332 "For the artists in the show," Brenson writes, "there is not one history but many." Brenson, "Visual Arts," n.p.

333 Paul Hoover, "Stark-Strangled Banjos: Linguistic Doubleness in the Work of David Hammons, Harryette Mullen, and Al Hibbler," *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry* 5 (1999): 75.

looked backward to images of her ancestors, while using a visual style which indicated a relationship to modernism and to looking forward: she marked her historic home with indicators of the present and the future. In *House of the Future*, Hammons takes the local domestic structures as a template for a new construction, one marked by his use of found materials and detritus. What does it mean to use an old form and old materials to make something new, in a context inflected by curatorial ideas about past and future, and in a neighborhood which exists off the beaten path of preservation tourism? One way of answering this question might be posed by returning to Edward Bellamy, the 19th century author whose 1887 novel *Looking Backward* suggested a way of looking to the past from the position of an ideal future. To make change in the present, Bellamy's novel suggests, requires seeing the present with the eyes of someone who lives in one's ideal future. Looking backward, then, is a way of building a new future—for Bellamy, it functioned as an inherently political gesture.

In 1898, Bellamy published a short story titled "The Blindman's World," in which he revisited his earlier idea of past-gazing. In the story, an astronomy professor who has spent his life studying the planet Mars is mysteriously transported to the planet, where he finds a society of human-like Martians. The difference between Earth's population and the population of Mars exists in their relationship to temporality: the Martians know the events that will take place in the future, and they have little interest in events of the past. "If our historians were to wait till after the events to describe them, not only would nobody care to read about things already done, but the histories themselves would probably be inaccurate; for memory, as I have said, is a very slightly developed faculty

with us, and quite too indistinct to be trustworthy," reports a representative of the Martians.[334] The Blindman's World of Bellamy's title is Earth, where humans insist upon looking backward rather than forward. When the story's narrator returns to his home, he observes for the first time a "lack of foresight" inherent in human nature:

> …a lack I had scarcely thought of before, now impresses me, ever more deeply, as a fact out of harmony with the rest of our nature, belying its promise,--a moral mutilation, a deprivation arbitrary and unaccountable. The spectacle of a race doomed to walk backward, beholding only what has gone by, assured only of what is past and dead, comes over me from time to time with a sadly fantastical effect which I cannot describe.[335]

In each of the chapters of this dissertation, I have presented a study of specific groups of people who have made art in which they negotiated ideas about the past and the future in and of the South. The period of the Great Depression was a particularly rich era for such temporal projects because the region embodied national anxieties about the future. Further, the propensity of Southerners to commemorate events of the Civil War, to look backward to the traumas of the 19th century and the opportunities and problems posed during Reconstruction, has fixed it in national consciousness as a region that looks only backward. The South is often considered an inherently backward place, and here the term evokes unsatisfactory progress in culture, modernization, social policy, and urban planning. And yet, historical navel-gazing is certainly not unique to the South. Nor have retrogressive social policy or unchecked urban sprawl been located only south of the Mason Dixon line throughout the 20th century. When President Franklin Roosevelt

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[334] Edward Bellamy, "The Blindman's World," in *The Blindman's World and Other Stories* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1898), 24.

[335] Ibid., 28-29.

published *Looking Forward* in 1933, he wrote fondly about his own experiences in the South, and he grounded his optimistic social and economic policies in changes to be made in the region. For Roosevelt, the South was a land that would predict the success or failure of his New Deal programs across the country as a whole. Roosevelt's New Deal would be like a canary sent into the mine of the South; if it found fresh air there, there was hope for the United States.

A few weeks after President Barack Obama was elected in 2008, *TIME* magazine published a cover image of the new president superimposed over an iconic photograph of Roosevelt (Figure 82).[336] The original photograph shows Roosevelt seated in a car and turning to look over his right shoulder toward the photographer. He wears a grey suit and hat, and glasses and a cigarette in a holder accent his face. He smiles broadly, and his right arm is extended across the automobile's seatback, emphasizing his relaxed and genial posture. The 2008 *TIME* cover image replicates the photograph in black and white, and places President Obama's face and hands over Roosevelt's. The image incongruously adds Roosevelt's glasses and the cigarette to Obama's face. Obama's brown skin is the only colored part of the otherwise black and white image: the image seems to propose that the only difference between the two men was their difference in skin color.

The title which accompanied the cover image was "The New New Deal," and it directed the reader to an article which outlined ways that Obama could learn from his

[336] *TIME* Magazine, 24 November 2008, cover image.

Depression-era predecessor.[337] There were strong economic parallels to be drawn between 2008 and 1933: both were election years in which the national economy was in crisis, and international war loomed large. In his inaugural address, Roosevelt stated, "Practices of the unscrupulous money changers stand indicted in the court of public opinion, rejected by the hearts and minds of men."[338] He could easily have been describing the recession of the early 2000s. And yet, the *TIME* cover image does not make the two presidents parallel or draw a comparison between them. Instead, it overlays the two men, and places one in the other's clothes. It looks backward in order to flatten the present into a version of the past, and it softens this flattening by pointing to racial difference. Different skin color—the election of the first non-white president in the United States—was a signifier in 2008 of social progress: announcing Obama's election, *The New York Times* proclaimed "Obama Elected President as Racial Barrier Falls."[339] Looking only to race, the *Times* and other mainstream publications failed to mention how Obama's election indicated American frustration at the deepening divisions between upper-, middle-, and lower-class Americans, divisions heightened by the sustained dismantling of Roosevelt's New Deal programs. Considering conservative white Southern reactions against Obama as a product of historic racial divisions elided something else: white privilege in the South has historically also been about class

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337 Peter Beinart, "The New Liberal Order," *TIME* 172, no. 21 (November 24, 2008), 30-32.

338 Franklin D. Roosevelt: "Inaugural Address," March 4, 1933. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=14473. Accessed 15 July 2012.

339 *The New York Times*, 9 November 2008.

division and the location of power among the rich white elite. Obama's election—like Roosevelt's election—indicated a wave of American sentiment against the inequalities of a deeply flawed class system. The *TIME* image, by foregrounding Obama's skin color, participated in a trope used by the media throughout the election: in the media, the runoff between Hillary Clinton and Obama indicated progress because it was a runoff between a person the media identified primarily as a woman and another person the media identified primarily as black.[340]

In 2005, historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall published an article titled "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past." In it, she presents a case for expanding the context of the Civil Rights movement to consider its roots (and the roots of its right-wing detractors) over a much longer period of time than just the 1950s and 1960s. She also argues for an expanded notion of the many aims of the movement, suggesting that the popular narrative of the Civil Rights Movement as a case simply for desegregation is a simplified and inaccurate picture of the various movements' goals. The association of civil rights with Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream Speech*, for example, emphasizes King's dream that "children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character," and downplays his longstanding commitment to labor issues, fair pay, equal rights, and

[340] Here I am indebted to Cherise Smith's discussion of the politics behind assertions that we live in a "post-identity" moment. See especially Cherise Smith, *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). For a history of the changes in rhetoric about identity politics since the 1980s, see Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

decent housing.[341] The epigram to her article cites a more representative statement by King: "The black revolution is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws—racism, poverty, militarism, and materialism. It is exposing evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society…and suggests that radical reconstruction of society is the real issue to be faced."[342] Hall contests the "trope of the South as the nation's 'opposite other,'" arguing instead that racism is not particularly Southern, and that "institutionalized patterns of exploitation, segregation, and discrimination" have been and continue to be national patterns. Hall takes a long view of the past, noting the ways that dialogue existed between groups often seen as separate, and over periods of time which are often divided into hermetically sealed temporal frames. The 1960s, for example, are intricately connected to the 1930s and 1940s; to erase those connections erases important nuances of American experience and influence. Hall's long view undergirds an argument for a politics of history writing—one which denies simplified narratives because they are too easily used to stifle the expansive hopes and dreams for improved living and working conditions, sexual freedom, creativity, opportunity, and community construction which have propelled American civil rights movements. The historical legacies left behind by the social evils of slavery and the perpetuation of white privilege throughout the 20th century "cannot be waved away by declaring victory, mandating formal, race-neutral public policies, and allowing market forces to rule," Hall writes:

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[341] Hall, "Long Civil Rights Movement," 1252.

[342] Ibid., 1233.

> Nor, of course, will understanding how the past weights on the present in itself resolve current dilemmas. But it can help cut through the miasma of evasion and confusion that cripples our creativity from the start. For many white Americans have moved through what the critical theorist Walter Benjamin termed 'this storm…we call progress' without coming to terms with the past.[343]

In each chapter of this dissertation, I write about the seams of apparently monolithic categories: the South, Modernism, documentary, and community. Working with archival collections (which are all inherently fragmented and subjective), then, indicates my own belief in the impossibility of writing a monolithic, objective narrative. Historians look backward, often seeing the past through eyes affected by how they (we!) want to see the present, and looking for lessons. If the studies in this dissertation offer any one particular lesson, it might be that looking outside of the expected sites of culture—whether those be places, movements, or types of artistic production—indicates how culture functions for many people in their everyday lives. Further, it allows us to see more clearly how supposedly monolithic cultural sites are produced and maintained in historical narratives. In her "Long Civil Rights Movement" article, Hall calls for historical writing which tells personal stories as they intertwine with larger institutional stories: "…such novel forms of storytelling can … help us imagine—for our own times—a new way of life, a continuing revolution."[344]

Over the course of the 1991 Spoleto Festival, Charleston artist Larry Jackson used the narrow downstairs space of the *House of the Future* as a studio. There he painted "portraits" of old houses in the area. By inviting Jackson to paint in the house, Hammons

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[343] Ibid., 1262.

[344] Ibid., 1262-1263.

reinforced the project's relationship to local traditions. Not only is Charleston's domestic architecture a central feature of the city's tourism industry, but paintings of old houses have developed into a spin-off industry of their own—the painters of the Charleston Renaissance held regular tea parties in their homes, where visitors could come see (and buy) their paintings of historic Charleston structures. We might see *The House of the Future* as an insertion into a longer historical narrative: Hammons points to the architecture-tourism industry of Charleston, locating it in a new site: an historically black neighborhood. Alternatively, *The House of the Future* might be understood as enacting something more like Bellamy's style of politically-charged temporal looking. Using discarded materials and junk to build a structure in a miniaturized form of historic Charleston architecture could be a way of looking backward. With the house, Hammons created a form associated with the past, but he did so through the eyes of a contemporary viewer; he shows the house to be a crumbling, haphazard, and absurd form, a structure both literally and imaginatively narrow. Across the street from *The House of the Future*, the neighborhood children are captured in a photograph: they crane their necks, looking up in the direction of a new flag.

APPENDIX A: FIGURES

Figure 1. Josephine Crawford, *Charles Henderson with His Nurse, Frances Gains*, 1934. Pastel, charcoal, and wash over white and gray grounds on patterned wallpaper, 83 1/8 x 57 7/8 in. New Orleans, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

Figure 2. Josephine Crawford, *Agatha Bienvenu, Seated with Cane*, 1934. Pastel, charcoal, and wash over white and gray grounds on patterned wallpaper, 82 15/16 x 51 in. New Orleans, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

Figure 3. Josephine Crawford, *Charles Campbell Crawford and His Grandfather*, 1934. Pastel, charcoal, and wash over white and gray grounds on patterned wallpaper, 83 1/16 x 63 3/16 in. New Orleans, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

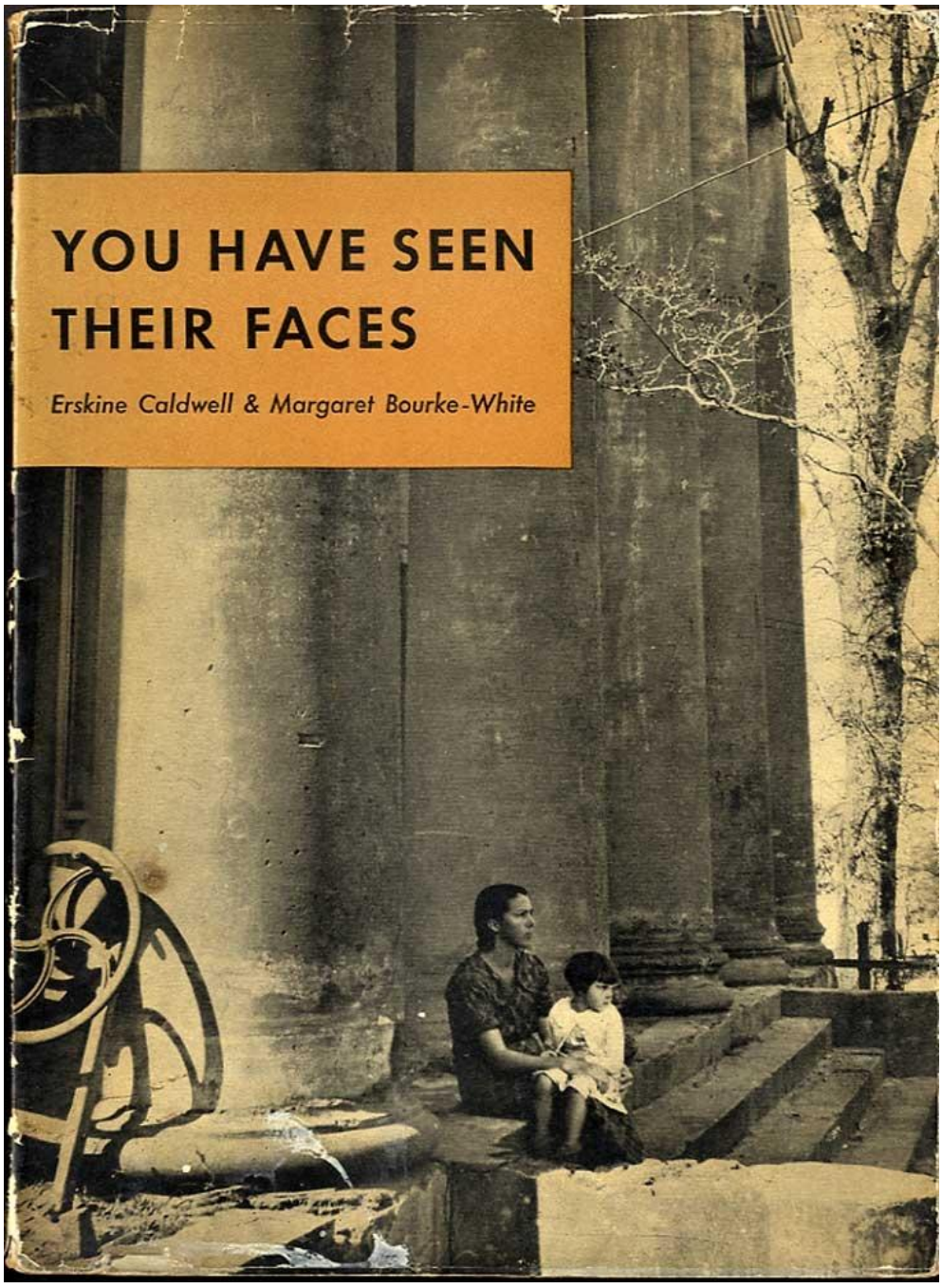


Figure 4. Cover of *You Have Seen Their Faces* by Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White (1937).

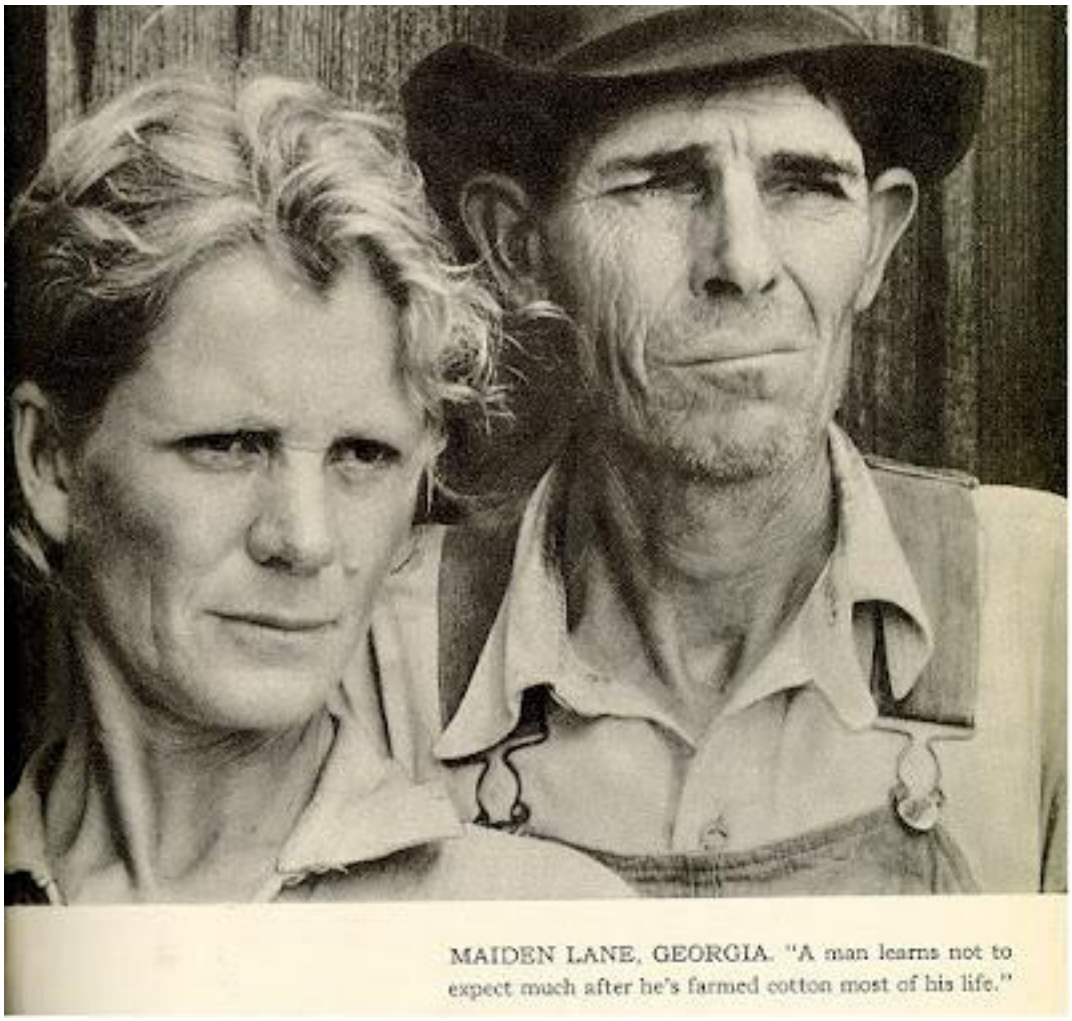


Figure 5. Image and legend from *You Have Seen Their Faces*, "A man learns not to expect much after he's farmed cotton most of his life."

Figure 6. Walker Evans, *Louisiana Plantation House*, 1935. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 7. Walker Evans, *Breakfast Room at Belle Grove Plantation, White Chapel, Louisiana*, 1935. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 8. Walker Evans, *Jane Ninas and Christine Fairchild on Balcony, Belle Grove Plantation House, White Castle, Louisiana*, March 1935. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

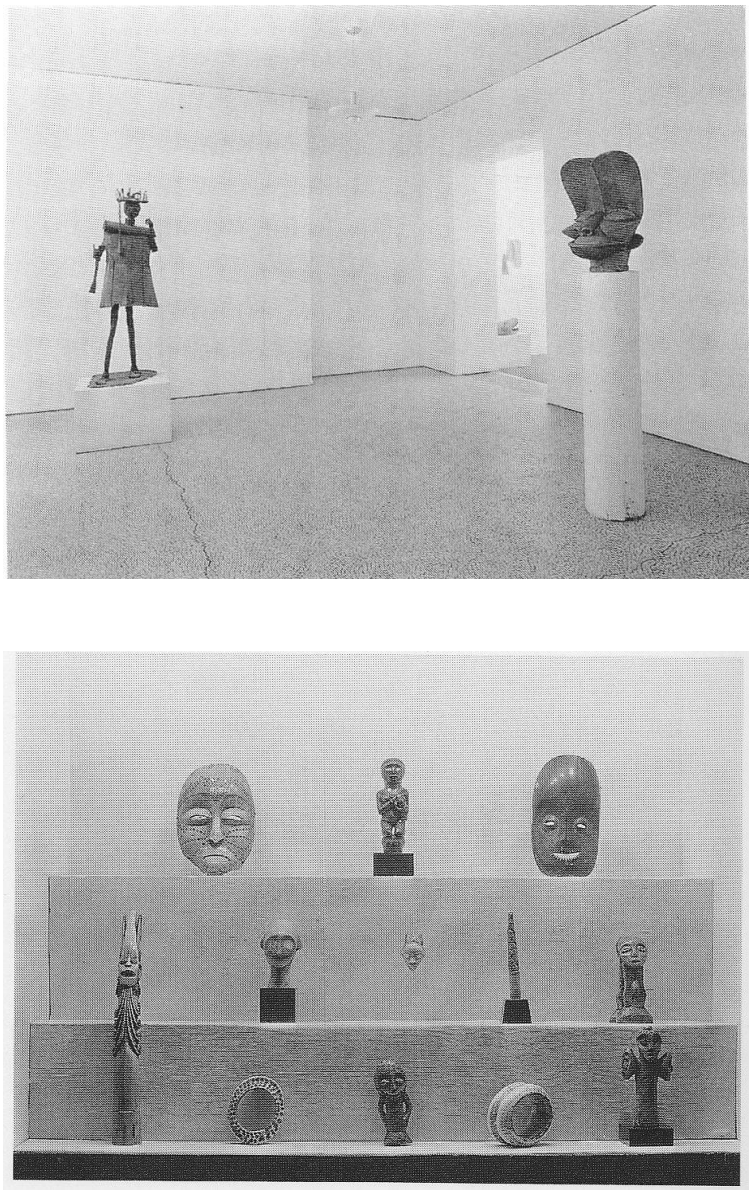


Figure 9. Installation views of *African Negro Art* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, March 18-May 9, 1935.

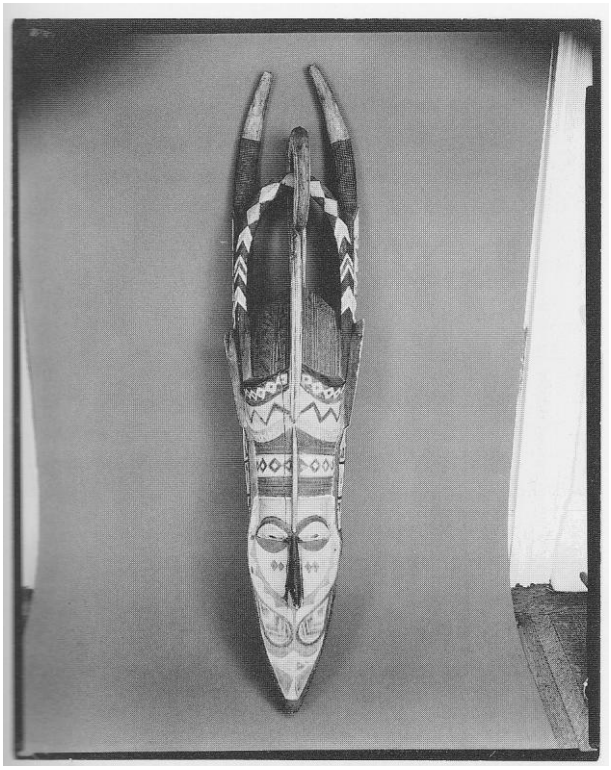


Figure 10. Walker Evans, untrimmed work print, Mask [Banda headdress], 1935. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Photograph Study Collection, Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas.

Figure 11. Walker Evans, untitled photographs of ancestral figure head, 1935. Reliquary sculpture (Nlo Bieri), Africa, Gabon, Fang peoples.

Figure 12. Walker Evans, *Movie Theatre on Saint Charles Street*, 1935 or 1936. Liberty Theater, New Orleans, Louisiana. Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Figure 13. Walker Evans, *Negro House in New Orleans*, *Louisiana*, 1936. Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Figure 14. Ben Shahn, *Street Scene in New Orleans, Louisiana*, 1935. Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Figure 15. Ben Shahn, *In Front of Cathedral, New Orleans, Louisiana*, 1935. Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

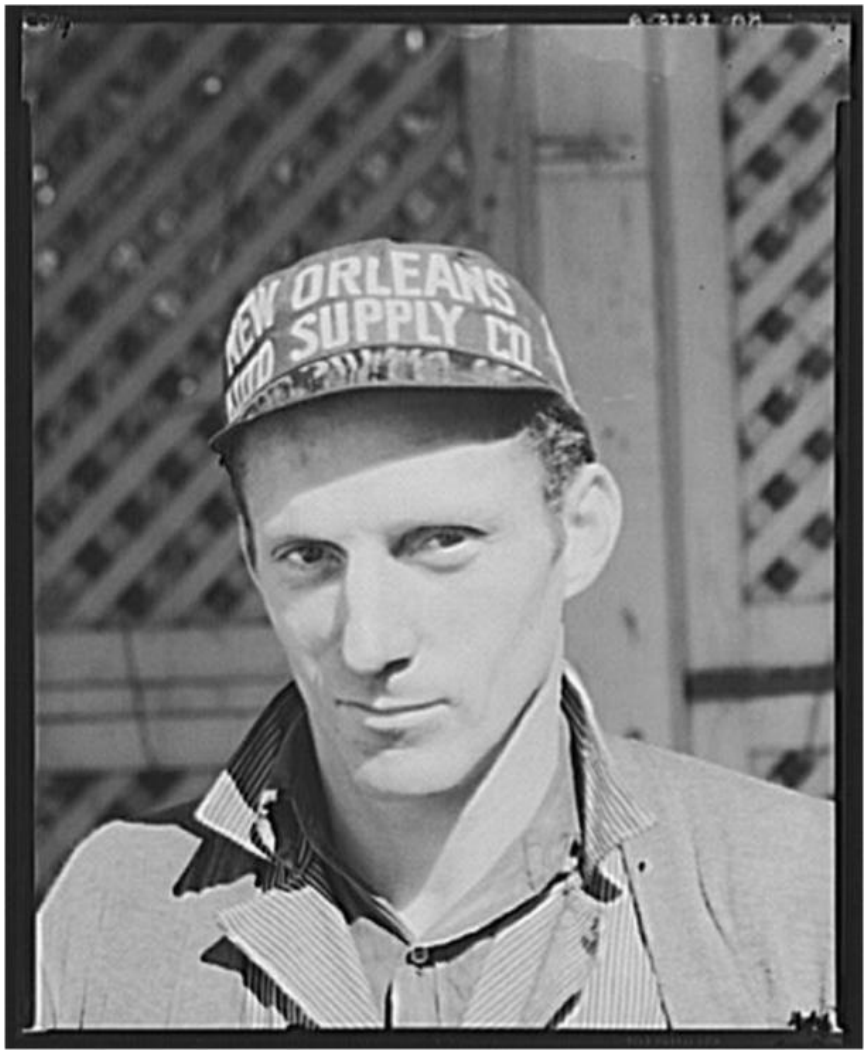


Figure 16. Walker Evans, *New Orleans Garage Mechanic*, *Louisiana*, 1936. Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

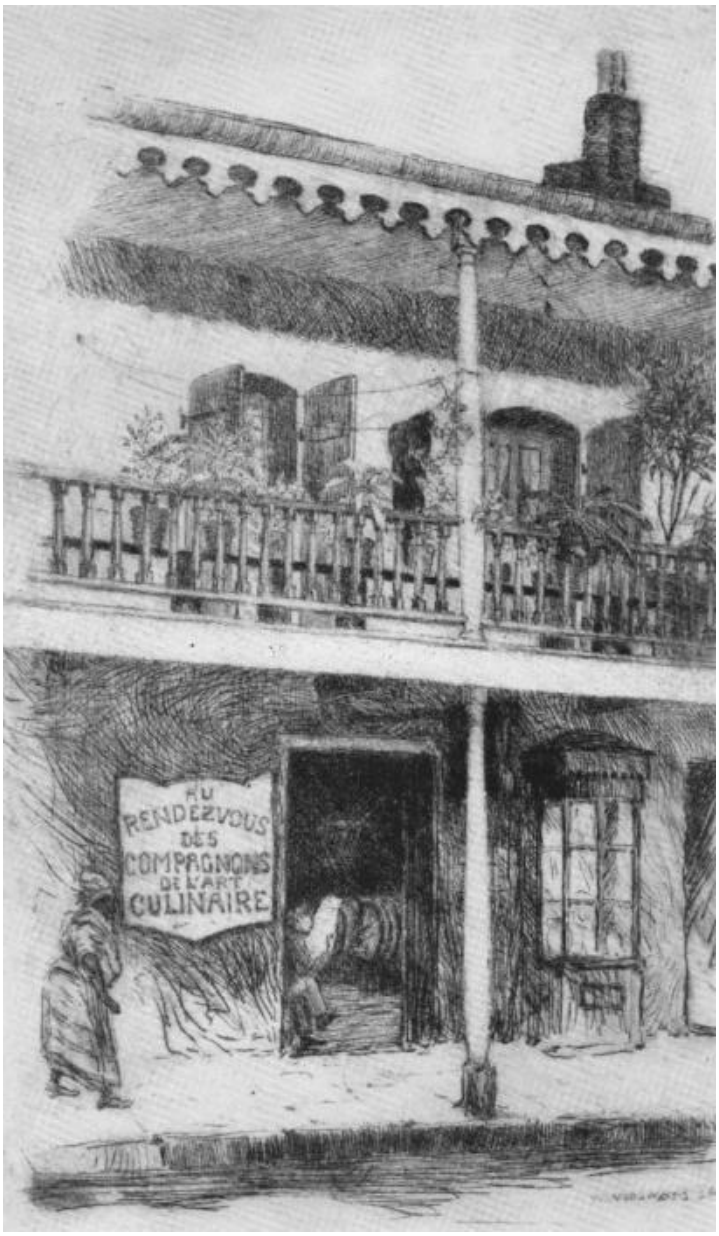


Figure 17. William Woodward, *'Au Rendezvous des Compagnons de l'Art Culinaire.' The Rendezvous of the Companions of Culinary Art—Chartres Street—in 1904*, 1938. *French Quarter Etchings*, plate 1.

Figure 18. William Woodward, *Negress on Levee Carrying Bundle on her Head*, 1938. *French Quarter Etchings*, plate 49.

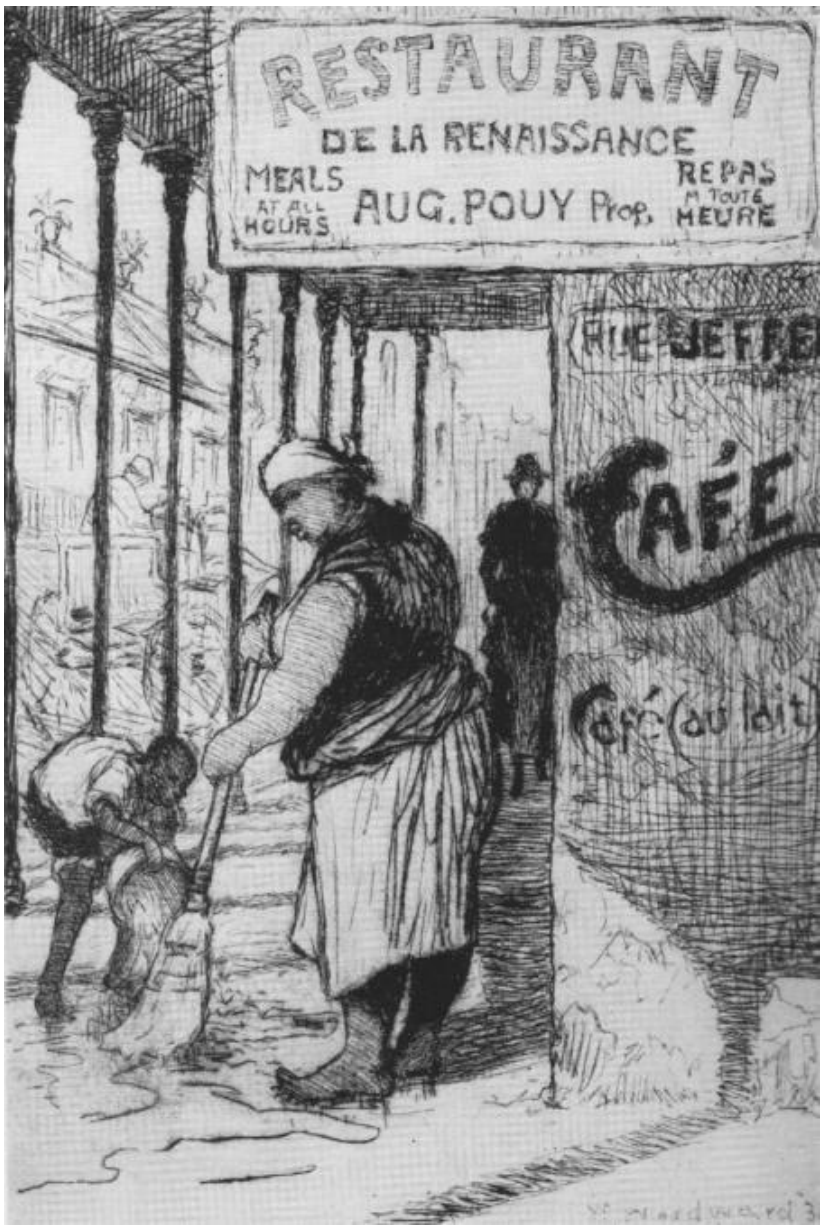
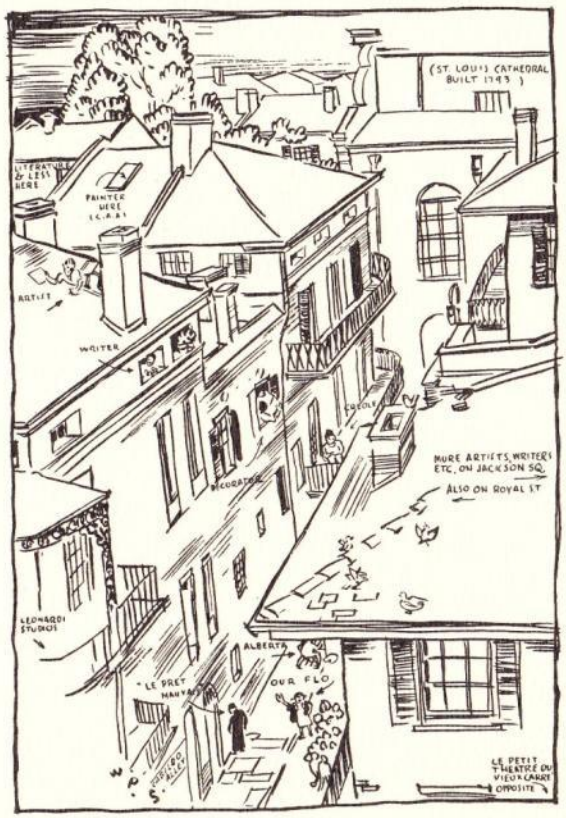


Figure 19. William Woodward, *Restaurant of the Renaissance*, 1938. *French Quarter Etchings*, plate 6.

Figure 20. William Woodward, *Negro Mammy Wearing Creole 'Tignon' Style of Headdress – 1915*, 1938. *French Quarter Etchings*, plate 42.



THE LOCALE, WHICH INCLUDES MRS. FLO FIELD

Figure 21. William Spratling, "The Locale, Which Includes Mrs. Flo Fields." Frontispiece to *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles*, 1926.

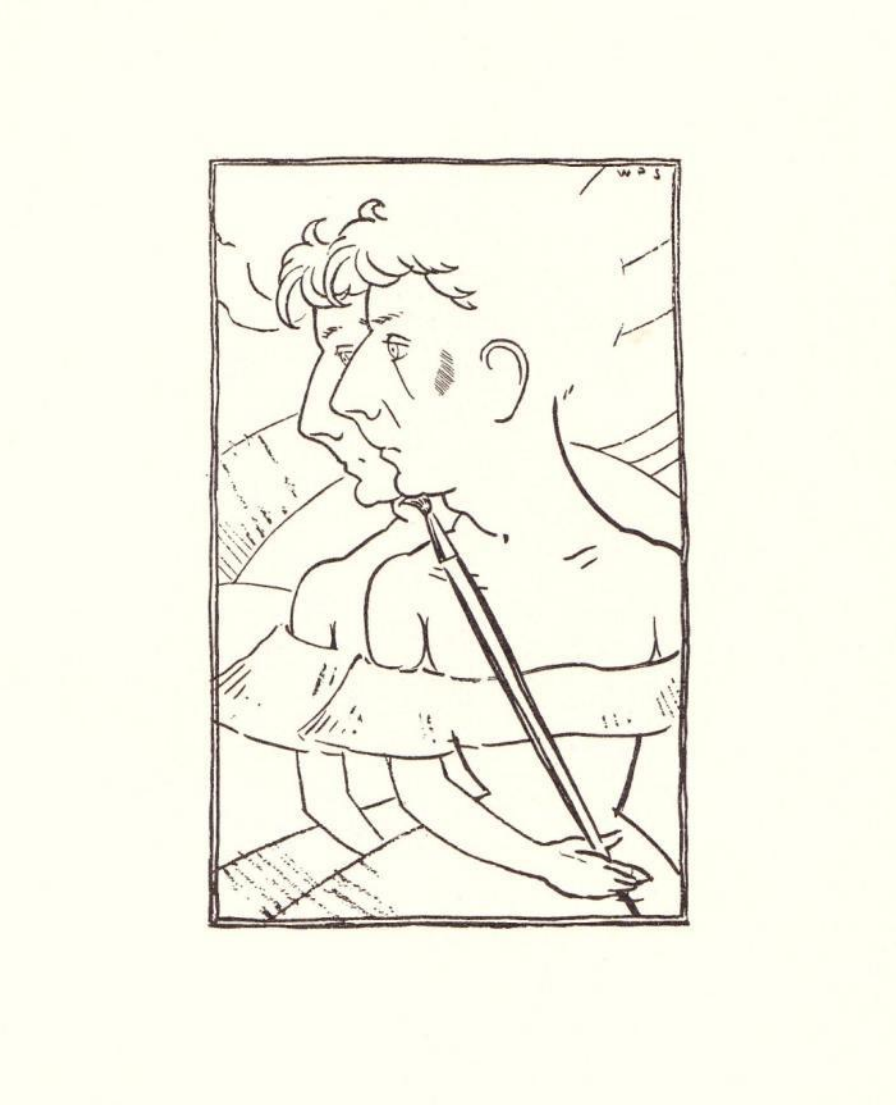


Figure 22. William Spratling, untitled caricature of Daniel Whitney. In *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles*, 1926.

Figure 23. William Spratling, untitled caricature of Grace King. In *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles*, 1926.

Figure 24. Wayman Adams, *Portrait of Miss Grace King*, 1926. New Orleans, New Orleans Museum of Art.

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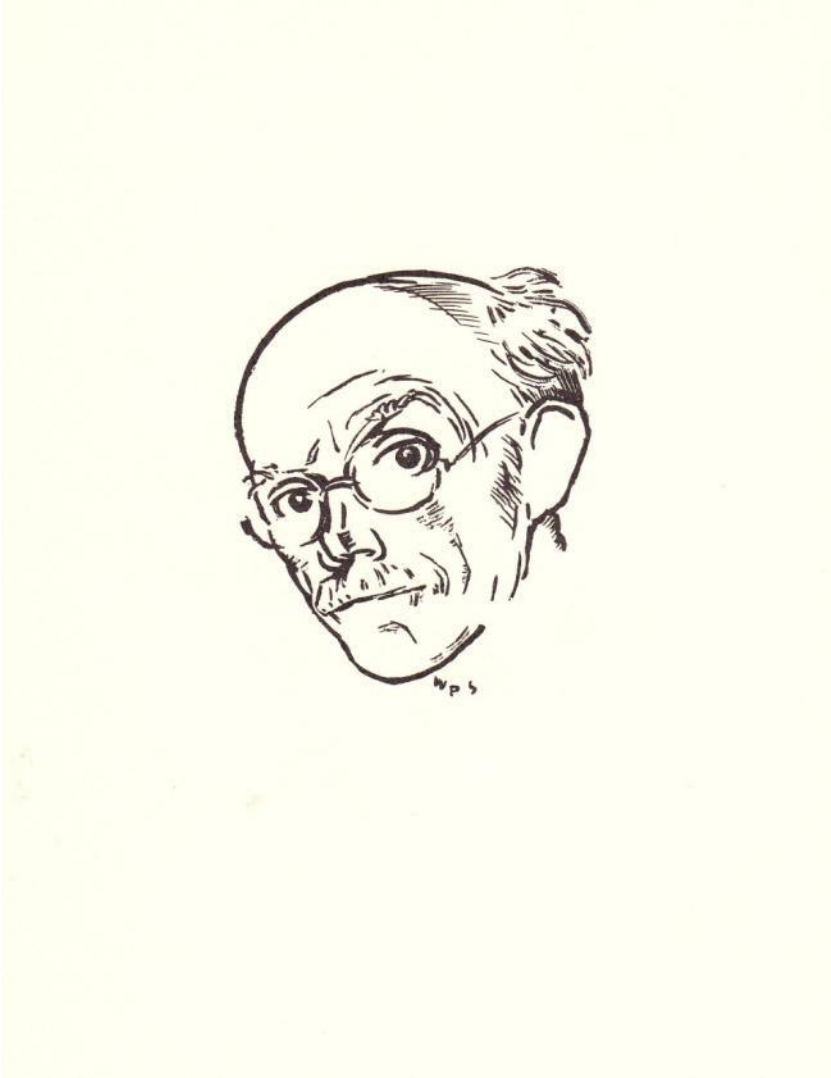

Figure 25. William Spratling, untitled caricature of Ellsworth Woodward. In *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles*, 1926.

Figure 26. Ellsworth Woodward, *Backyard in Covington*, oil on canvas, n.d.

Figure 27. Marion Post Wolcott, *Sunday Afternoon in New Orleans, Louisiana*, 1941. Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Figure 28. Marion Post Wolcott, *Sunday Afternoon in New Orleans, Louisiana*, 1941. Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Figure 29. Marion Post Wolcott, *Sunday Afternoon in New Orleans, Louisiana*, 1941. Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Figure 30. Marion Post Wolcott, *Sunday Afternoon in New Orleans*, *Louisiana*, 1941. Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Figure 31. Marion Post Wolcott, *Sunday Afternoon in New Orleans*, *Louisiana*, 1941. Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Figure 32. Marion Post Wolcott, *Sunday Afternoon in New Orleans*, *Louisiana*, 1941. Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Figure 33. Elise Harleston, photograph of Sue Bailey, 1930. Collection of Mae Gentry.

Figure 34. Edwin Harleston. *Portrait of Miss Sue Bailey with the African Shawl*, 1930.

Figure 35. Photograph of C. M. Battey's studio at Tuskegee University, undated. Tuskegee University Archives.

Figure 36. Photograph of C. M. Battey's studio at Tuskegee University, undated. Tuskegee University Archives.

Figure 37. Elise Harleston, untitled photograph, n.d. Collection of Mae Gentry.

Figure 38. Edwin Harleston, sketch book page, n.d. Collection of Mae Gentry.

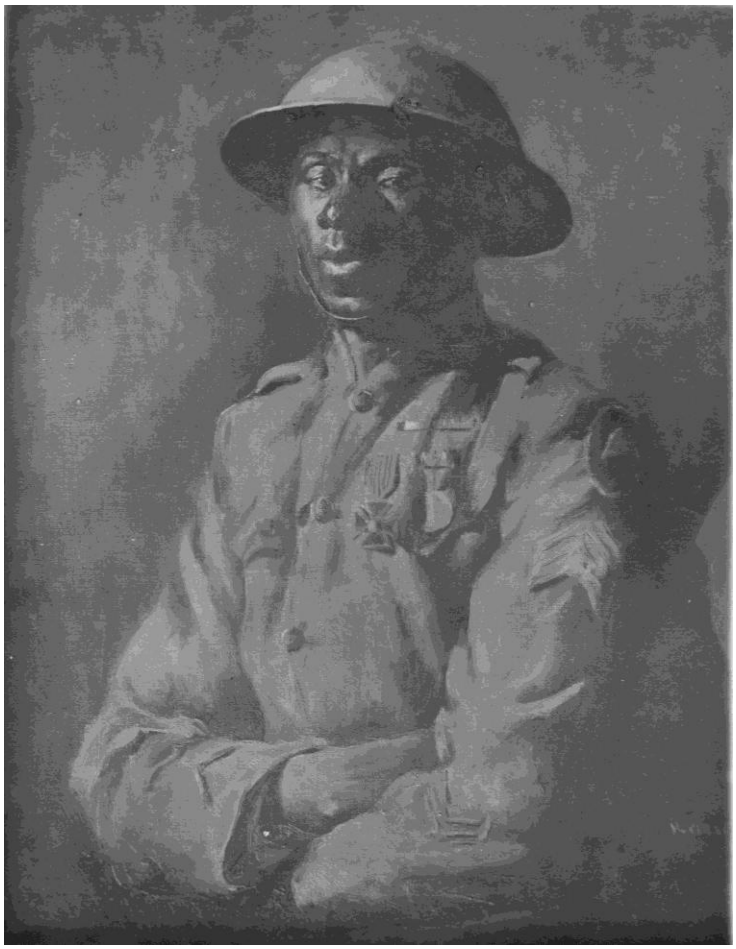

Figure 39. Edwin Harleston, *The Sergeant*, n.d.

Figure 40. Elise Harleston, untitled photograph, n.d. Collection of Mae Gentry.

Figure 41. Prentice H. Polk, *The Boss* from the *Old Character* series, 1932. Washington, D.C., Corcoran Gallery of Art.

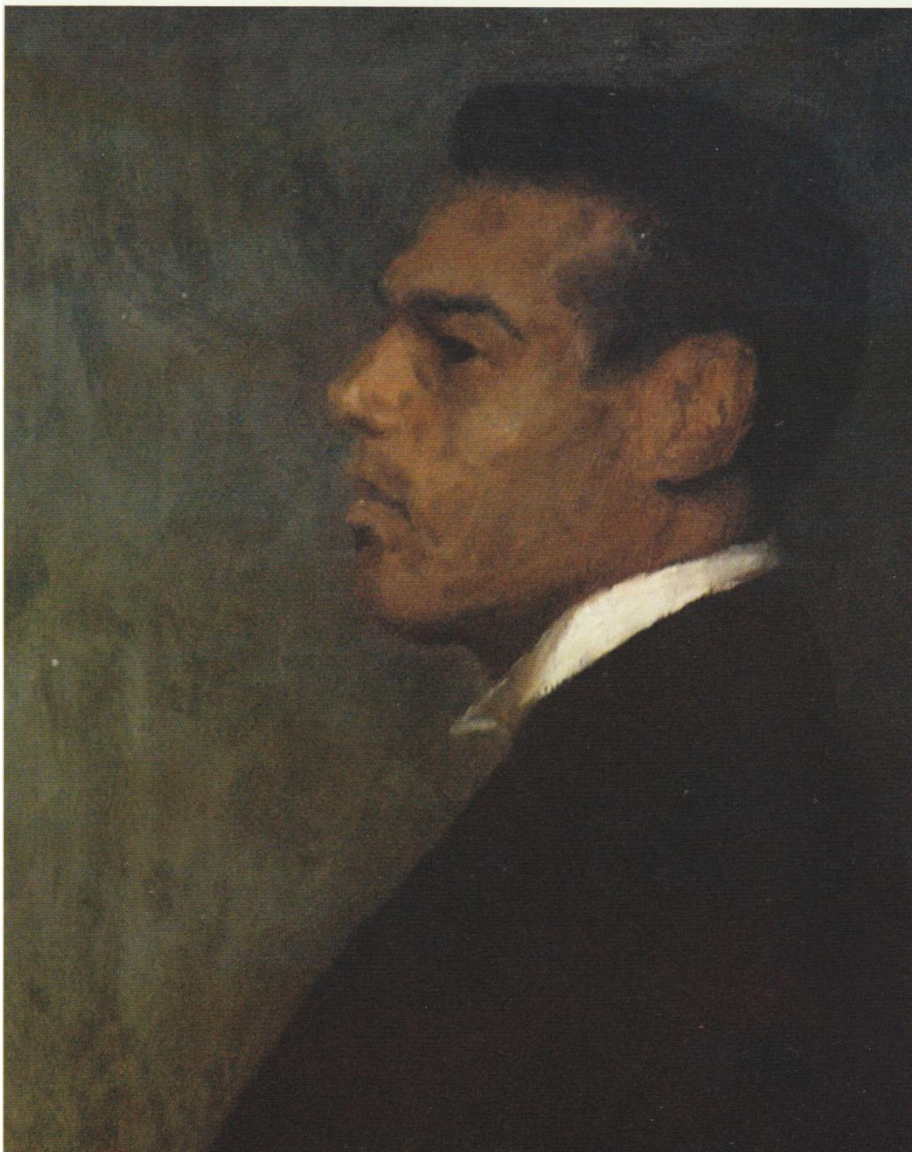

Figure 42. Edwin Harleston, *Self-Portrait in Profile*, ca. 1912. Philadelphia, Collection of Steven Jones.

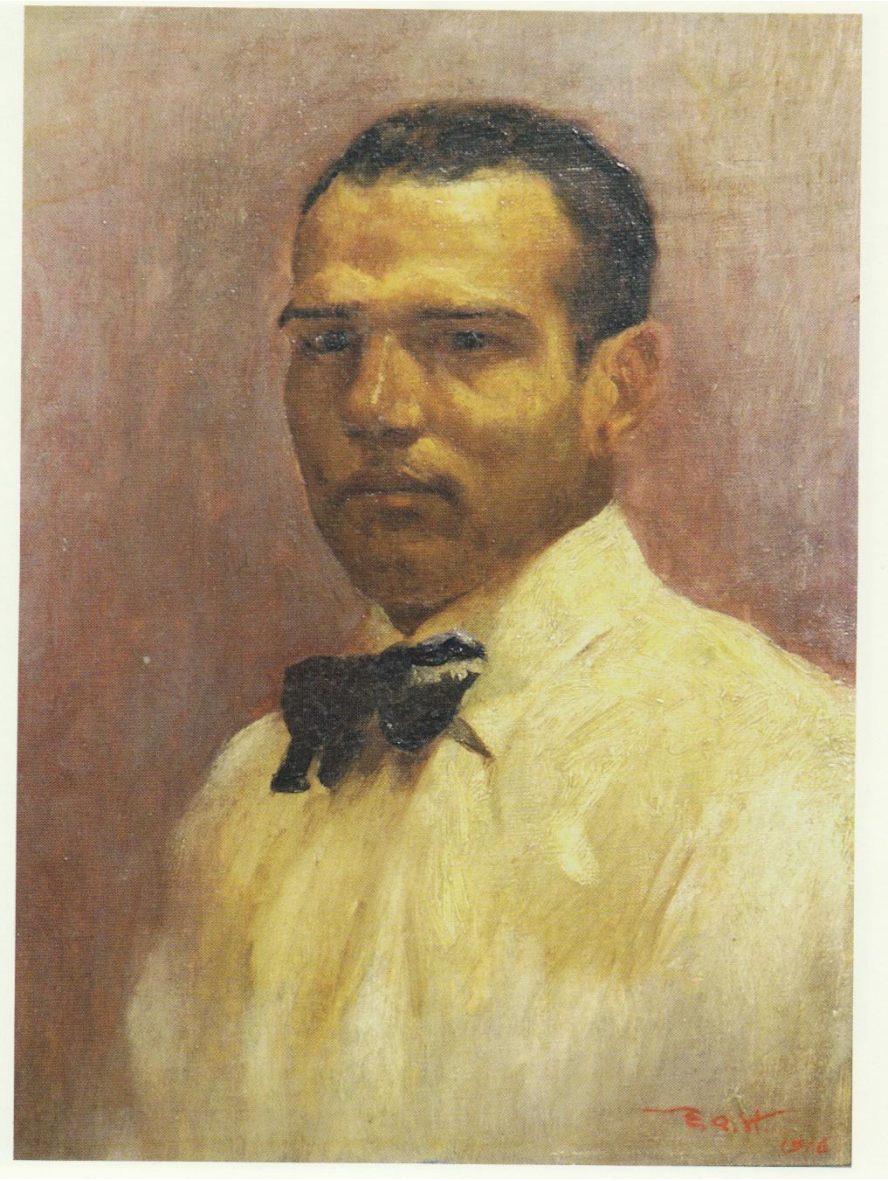

Figure 43. Edwin Harleston, *Self-Portrait*, 1916. Collection of Mae Gentry.

Figure 44. Photograph of Edwin Harleston with *The Sailor*, painted by Philip Adams, ca. 1910.

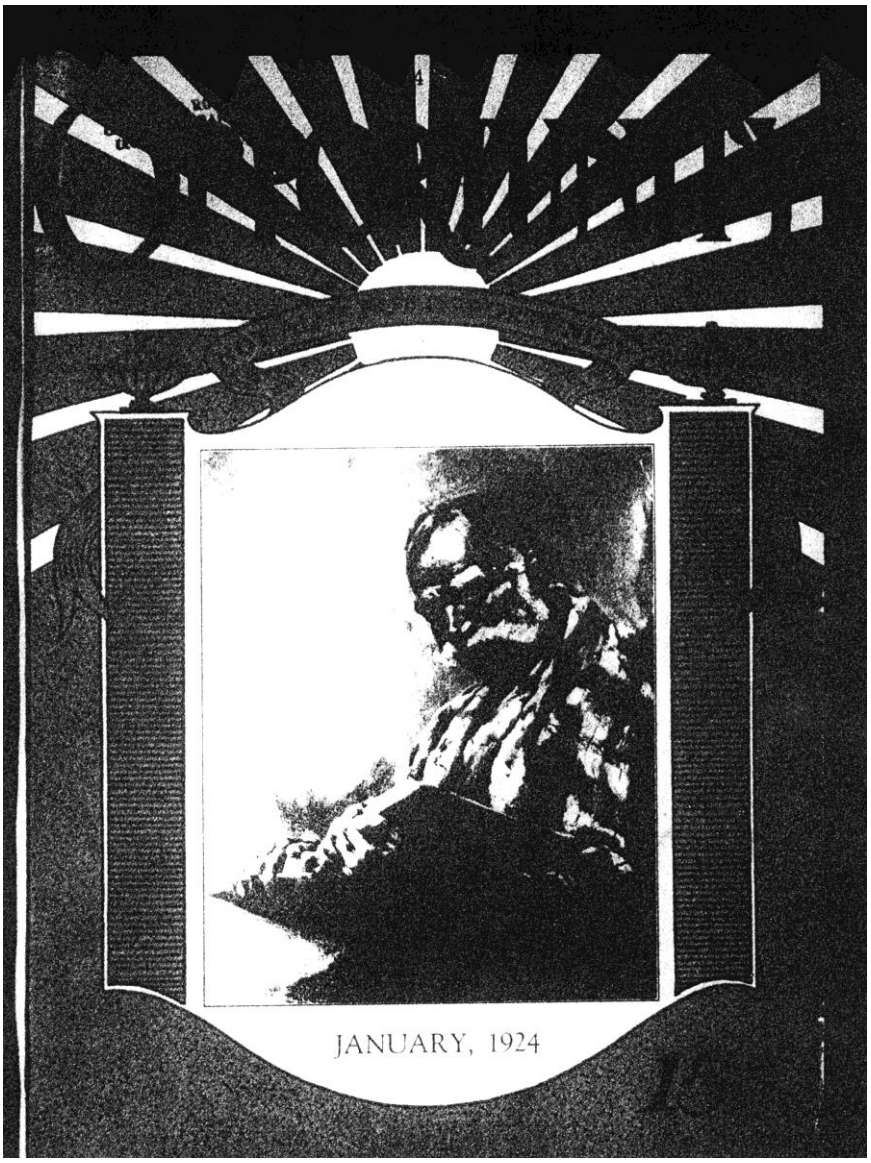

Figure 45. Cover of *Opportunity* magazine featuring Edwin Harleston's painting *The Bible Student*, 1924.

Figure 46. Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Thankful Poor*, 1894.

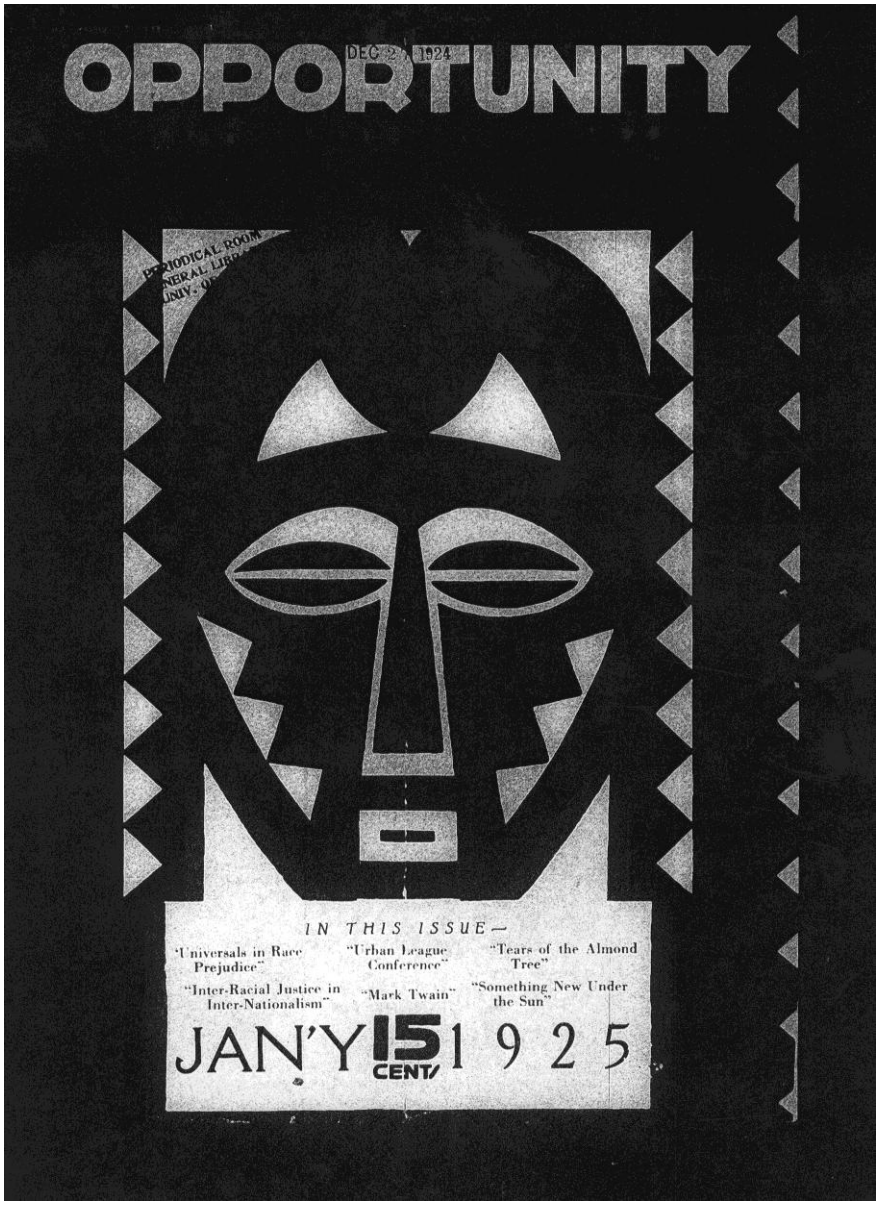

Figure 47. Cover of *Opportunity* magazine featuring untitled design by Winold Reiss, 1925.

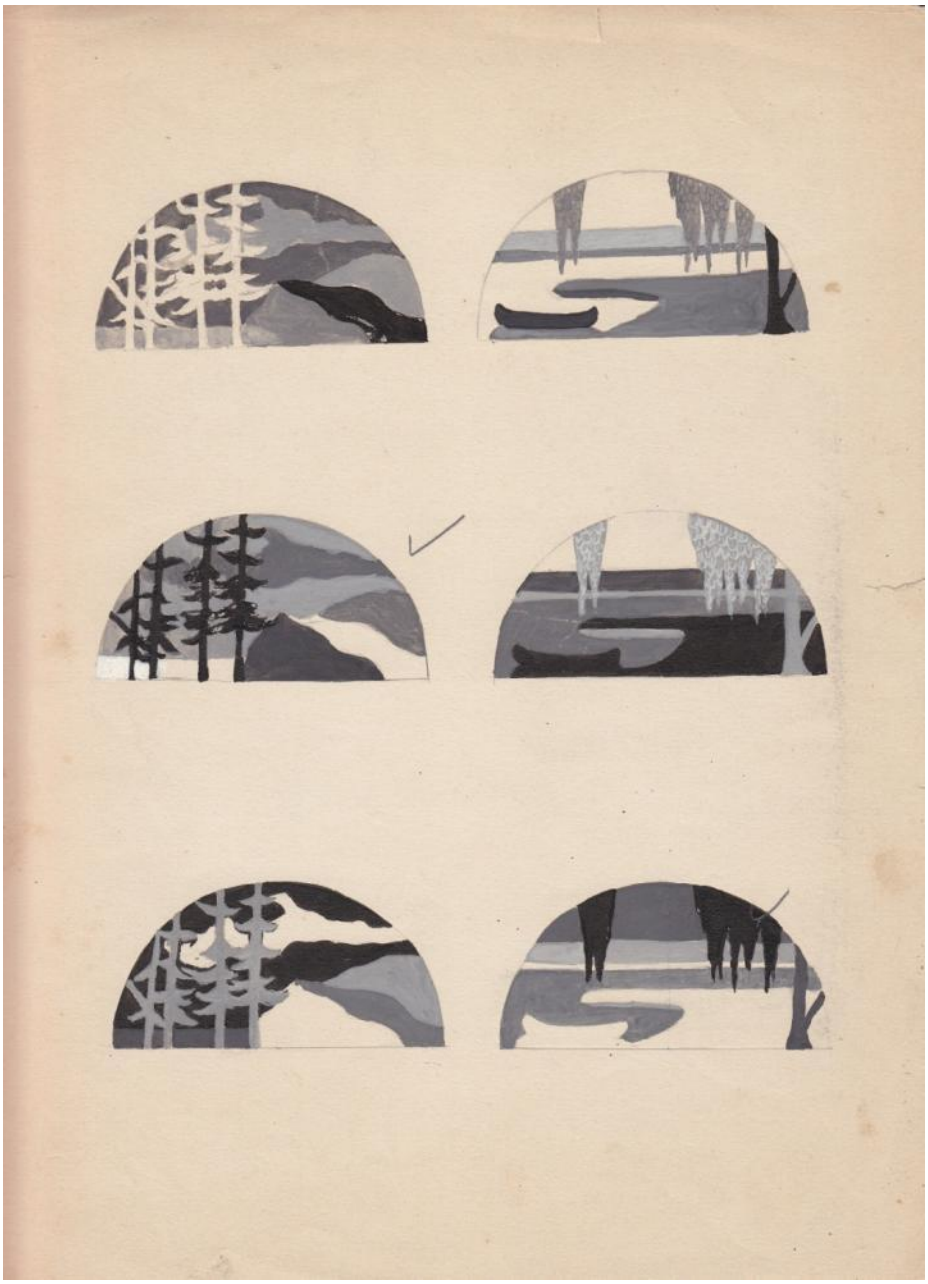

Figure 48. Edwin Harleston, untitled sketchbook page, n.d. Collection of Mae Gentry.

Figure 49. Edwin Harleston, Untitled, n.d. Collection of Mae Gentry.

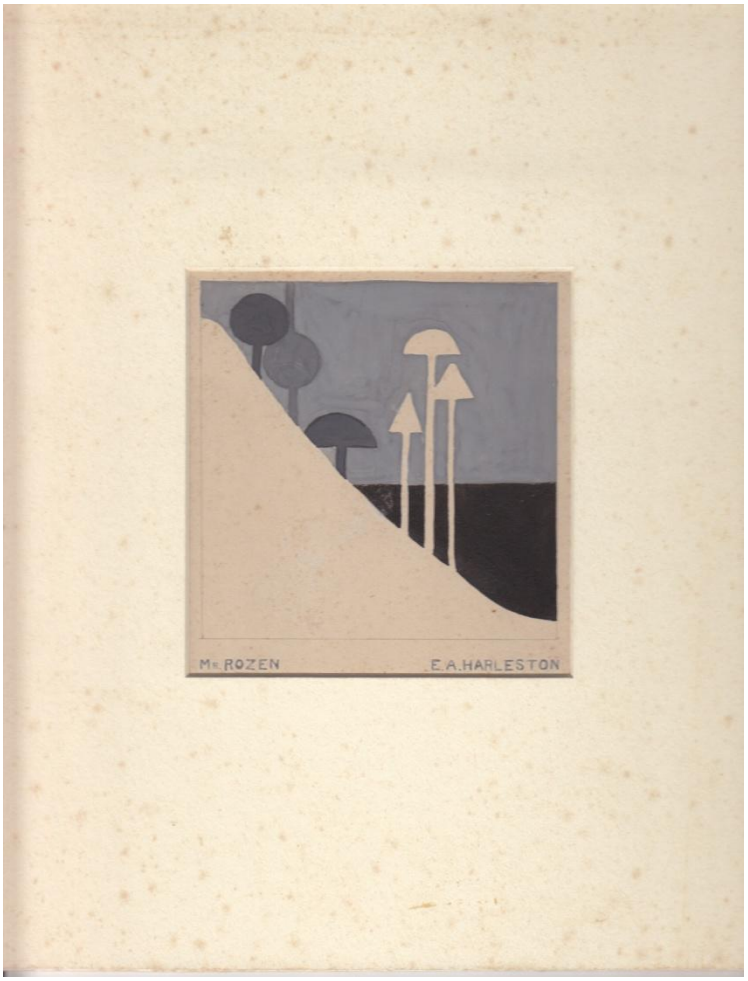

Figure 50. Edwin Harleston, Untitled, n.d. Collection of Mae Gentry.

Figure 51. Edwin Harleston, Untitled, n.d. Collection of Mae Gentry.

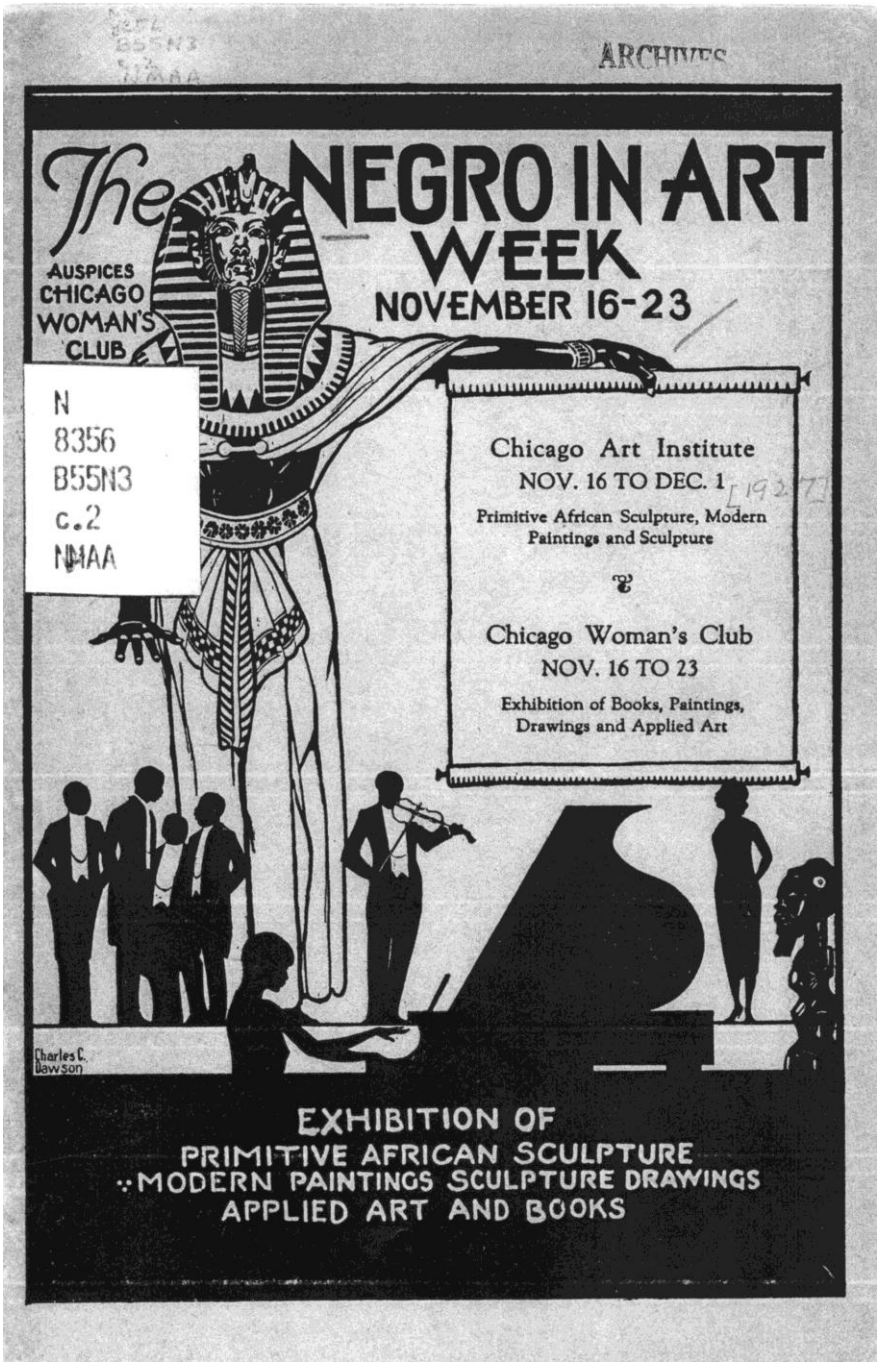

Figure 52. "Negro in Art Week" exhibition brochure, 1927. Design by Charles Dawson.

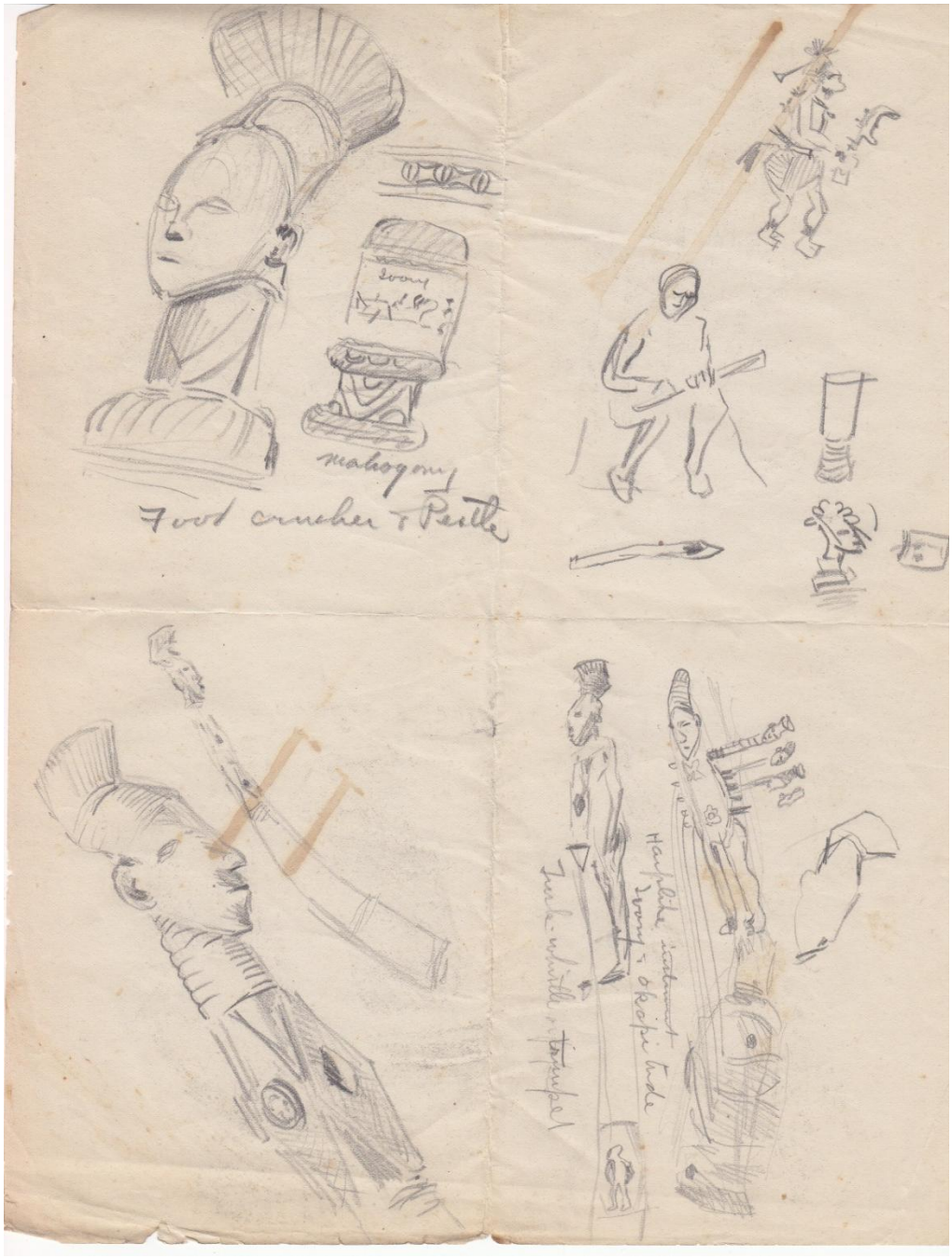

Figure 53. Edwin Harleston, sketch book page, n.d. Collection of Mae Gentry.

Figure 54. Edwin Harleston. *Portrait of Aaron Douglas*, 1930. Charleston, S.C., Gibbes Museum of Art.

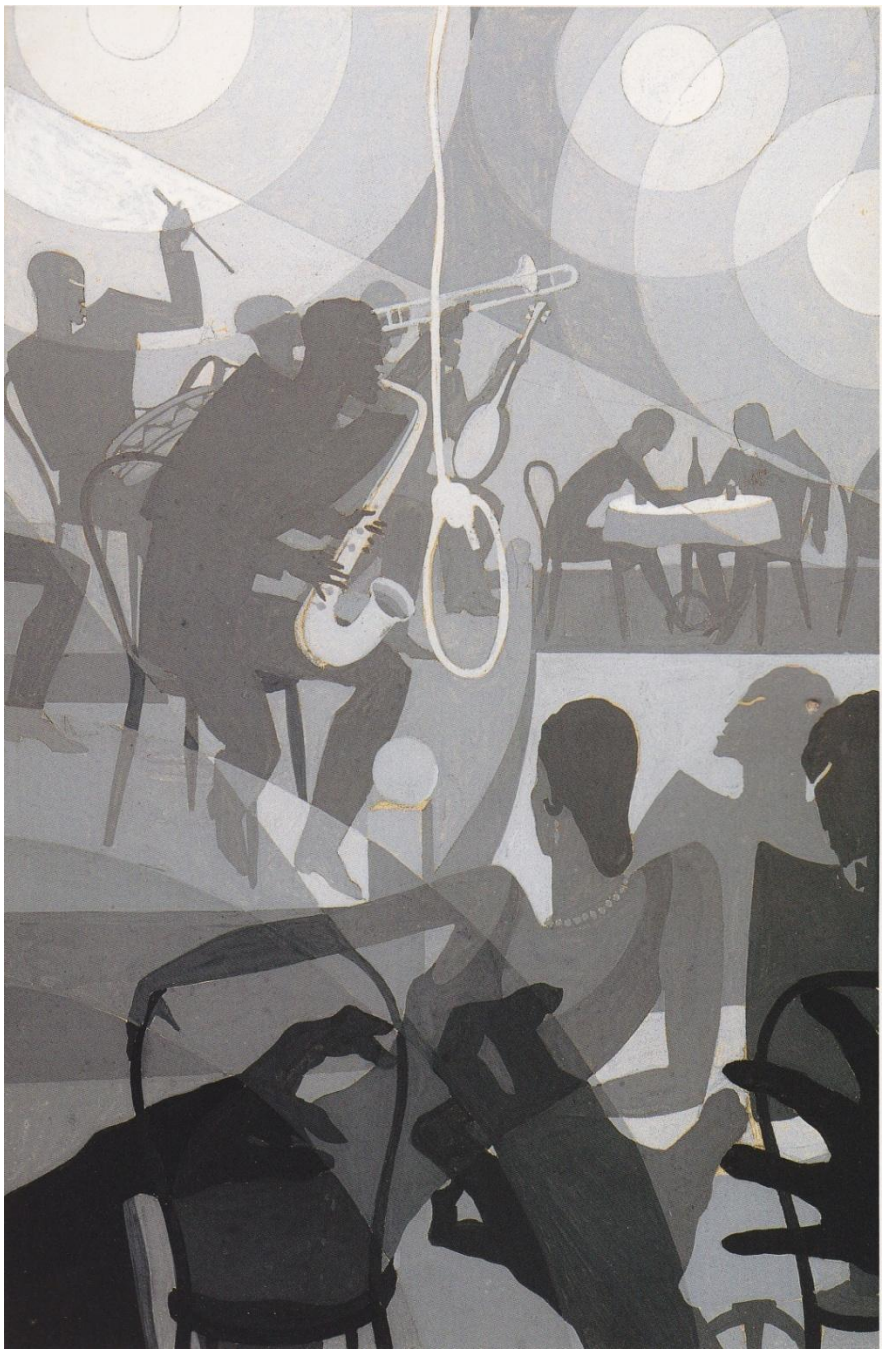

Figure 55. Aaron Douglas, *Charleston*, 1929. Illustration for Paul Morand's book *Black Magic*.

Figure 56. Aaron Douglas, *Idyll of the Deep South*, from *Aspects of Negro Life*, 1934. Oil on canvas, 5’ x 11’7”, New York, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

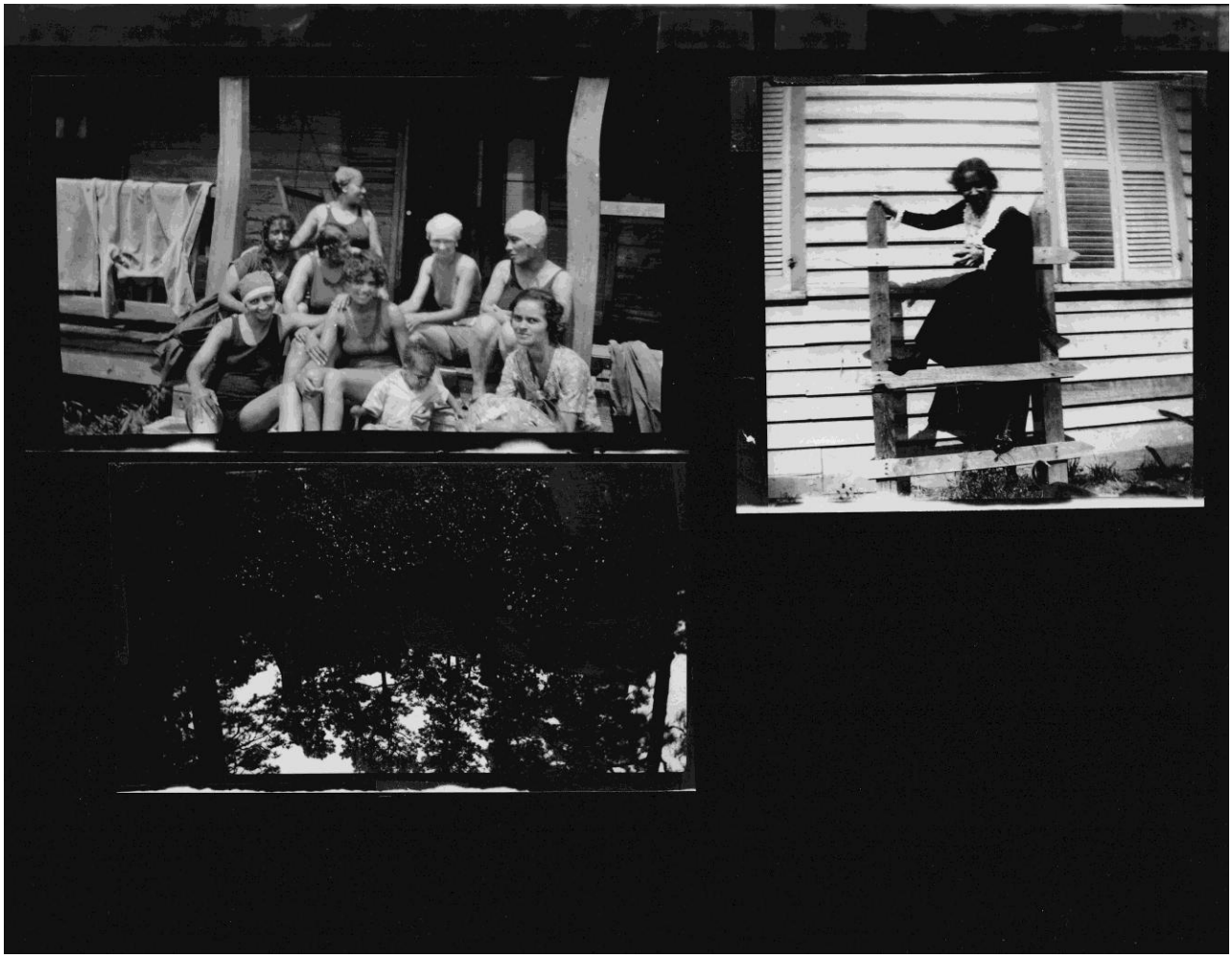

Figure 57. Elise Harleston, contact sheet with swimming excursion, n.d.

Figures 58, 59, 60. Elise Harleston, series of beach photographs, n.d.

Figure 61. Elise Harleston, holiday card, 1930.

Figure 62. Elise Harleston, untitled, n.d.

Figure 63. Photograph of New South members, ca. 1939.

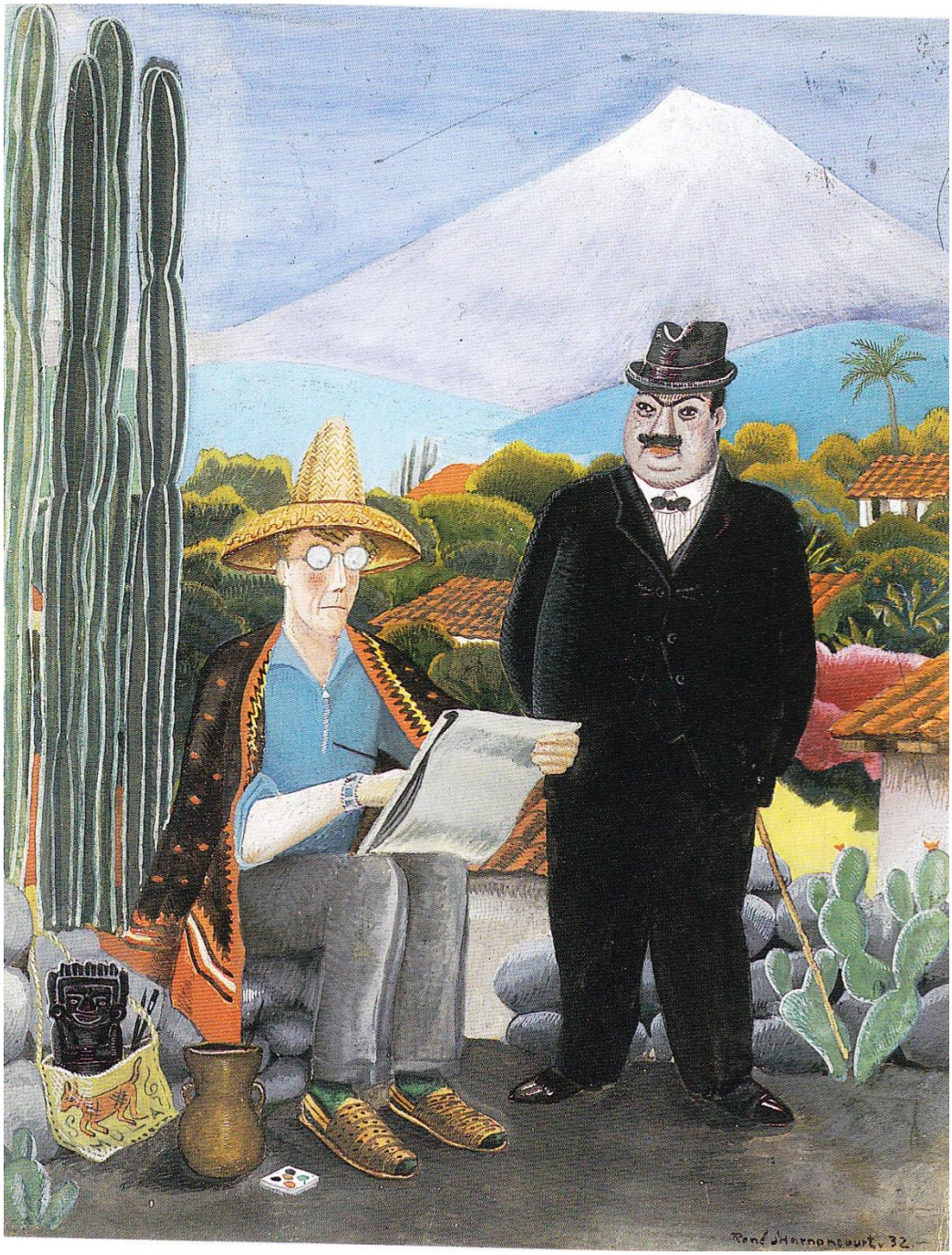

Figure 64. René d'Harnoncourt, *American Artist in Mexico*, 1932. Gouache. Philadelphia, Collection of Anne d'Harnoncourt.

Figure 65. John Lapsley, *Babies Dancing*, 1938. Oil on canvas, 30 x 27½ in. Collection of Carl and Nan Sims.

Figure 66. Murals by John Lapsley (left) and Charles Shannon (right) in the New South. Photographer unknown. Reprinted in *Deep Blues: Bill Traylor, 1854-1949.*

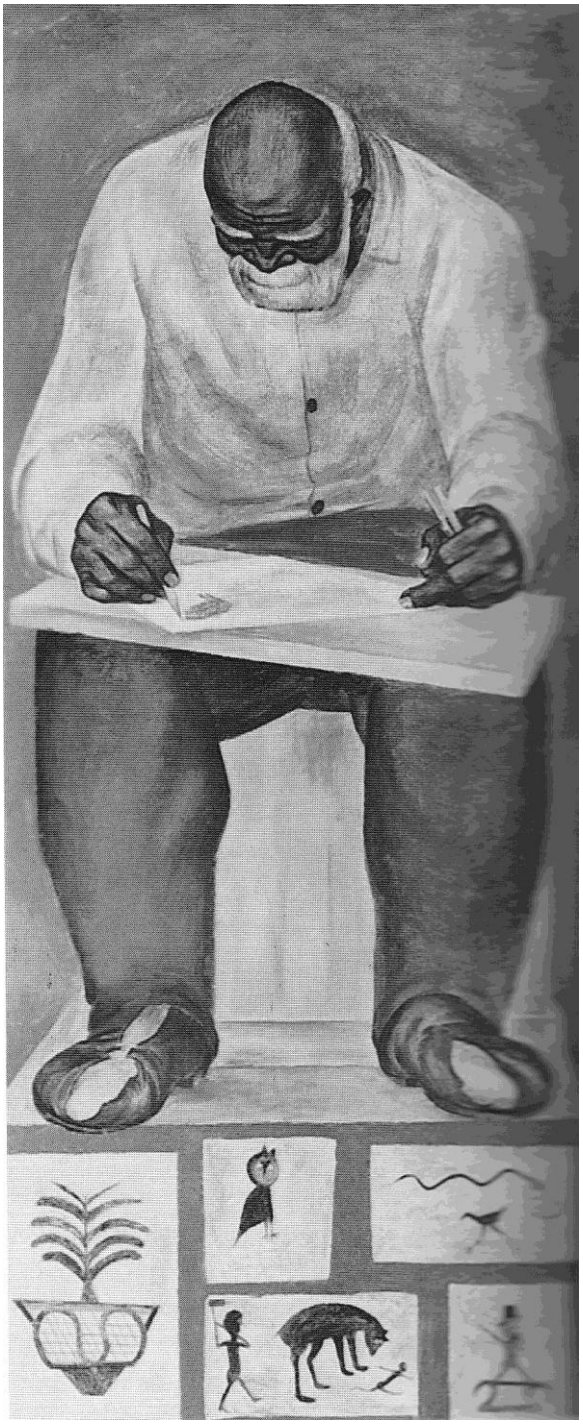

Figure 67. Charles Shannon, study for mural of Bill Traylor in the New South, 1939 (mural destroyed). Montgomery, The Montgomery Museum of Art.

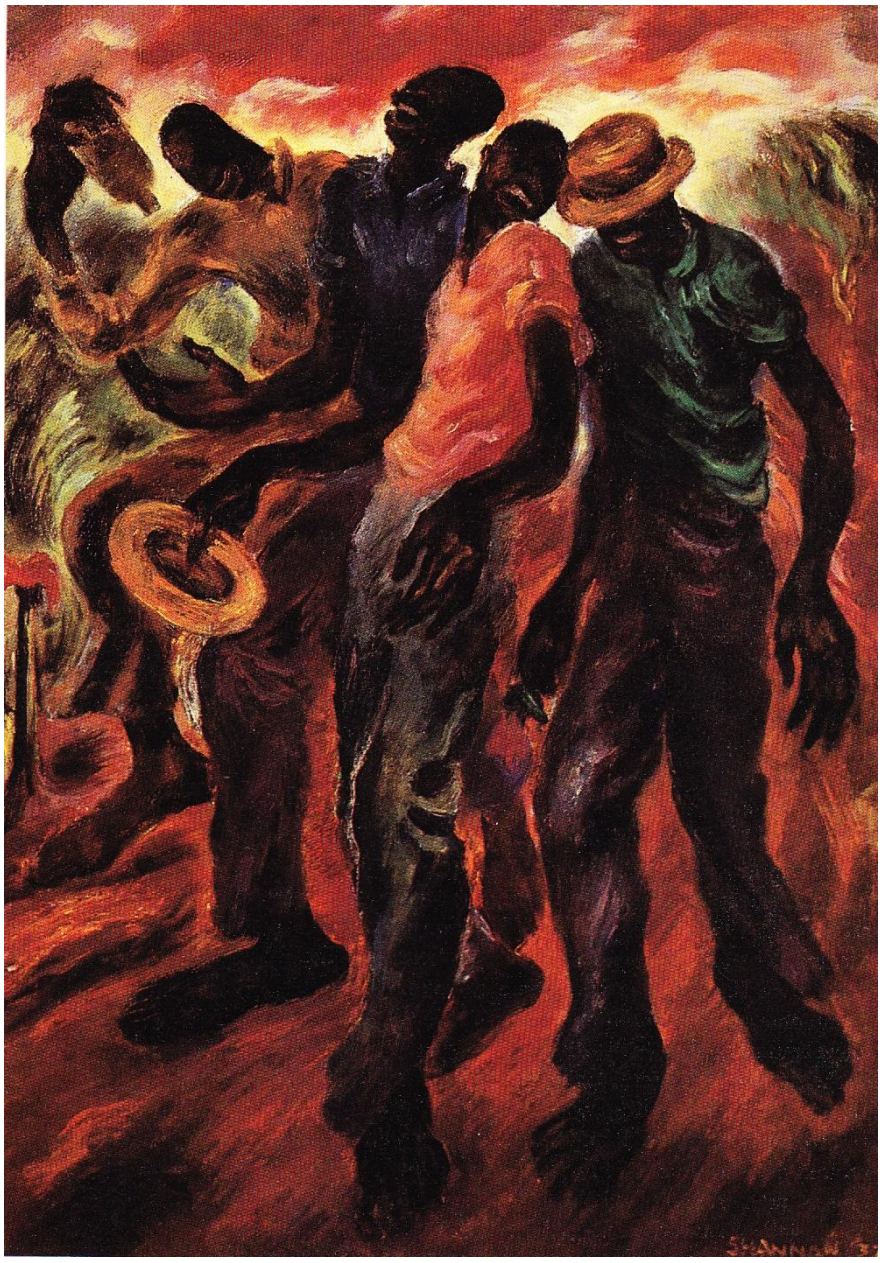

Figure 68. Charles Shannon, *Saturday Ev'nin*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 34 x 24 in. Augusta, Georgia, The Morris Museum of Art.

Figure 69. Charles Shannon, *The Lover*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 30¼ x 45 in. Montgomery, The Montgomery Museum of Art.

Figure 70. Thomas Hart Benton, *Arts of the South*, 1936.

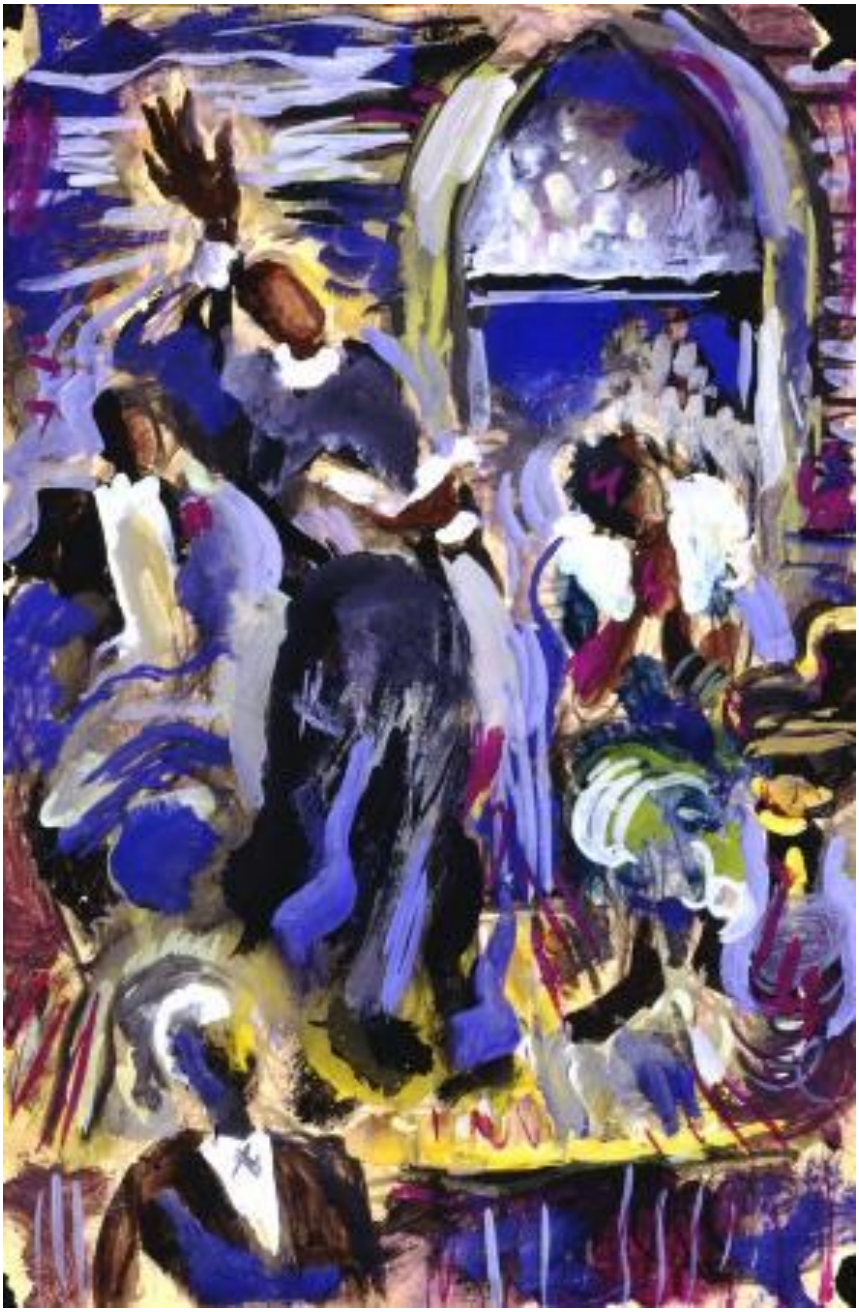

Figure 71. Charles Shannon, *Syncopation Number 1*, ca. 1939. Watercolor and gouache on paper, 9 x 6 in. Charleston, The Charleston Renaissance Gallery.

Figure 72. Charles Shannon, *Syncopation Number 2,* ca. 1939. Watercolor and gouache on paper, 9 x 6 in. Charleston, The Charleston Renaissance Gallery.

Figure 73. Photograph of Crawford Gillis and John Lapsley in Manhattan, 1935. Text on verso (in John Lapsley's handwriting) reads: "Walking down Lexington Avenue, October 23, 1935 after having interviewed Alma Reed. Portfolio under my arm." Collection of Miriam Rogers Fowler.

NEGRO TOMBSTONE CUTTER AND ART HE WILL SHOW HERE

By courtesy of Museum of Modern Art
A sculpture of a preacher

By courtesy of Museum of Modern Art
A carving of an angel

MODERN MUSEUM TO SHOW NEGRO ART

Work of Unlettered Tombstone Cutter of Nashville, Tenn., to Be in One-Man Show

UNTRAINED IN SCULPTURE

His Creations Termed 'Modern Primitive'—Craftsman Discovered by Photographer

An honor which might be envied by some of the country's leading sculptors has fallen to the lot of an unknown and untrained Negro tombstone cutter.

Until four or five years ago William Edmondson was content to be a handy man in Nashville, Tenn. Then he was converted and he says that the call came to him to preach and cut tombstones and sculpture at God's command.

Last Summer some of his work, which comes within the category loosely termed "modern primitive," was called to the attention of the Museum of Modern Art, 14 West Forty-ninth Street, of which Mrs. John D. Rockefeller Jr. was one of the founders and still is a leading member of the board of trustees. The result is that a one-man show of Edmondson's work will be opened in the museum, near Fifth Avenue, on Oct. 27.

One-man exhibitions of the work of even trained Negro painters and sculptors are a rarity in New York galleries, and none has ever been held at the Museum of Modern Art. Hitherto the museum's one-man exhibitions have emphasized the work of outstanding figures in modern art.

A New York photographer, Louise Dahl-Wolfe (Mrs. Meyer Dahl-Wolfe), discovered the work of Edmondson a year ago while visiting in Nashville. She bought some of his sculpture and made many photographs both of Edmondson and his work, and interested the Museum of Modern Art in it.

Asked about Edmondson's work yesterday, Alfred H. Barr Jr., director of the museum, said:

"Recognition of the achievements of naïve or self-taught artists is one of the discoveries of contemporary taste. Usually the naïve artist works in the easier medium of painting.

"Edmondson, however, has chosen to work in limestone, which he attacks with extraordinary courage and directness, to carve out simple, emphatic forms. The spirit of his work does not betray the inspiration which he believes to be his active guide."

Edmondson's life in Nashville is described here as that of the average Negro of his generation in the South. He gives his age as 50 years, and is said to be a simple, almost illiterate, entirely unspoiled craftsman, happy in his work. He probably has seen few pieces of sculpture not his own.

Edmondson works at his home in the Negro section of Nashville, his front yard littered with tombstones, most of them blank but some crudely lettered and awaiting the stray customer. His tombstone customers are rare and have little money to spend for Edmondson's wares. His works are small because he has never been able to buy large pieces of stone.

All Edmondson's sculpture is symbolic, and stems from the Bible, the only book with which he is familiar. His favorite subjects are Mary and Martha, the Lamb of God, doves and preachers. Edmondson is said to be pleased by praise, but does not care whether the public likes his work. He regards his sculpture with good humor and doing it pleases him greatly. He is said to scrupulously avoid profanity.

Some of the subjects to be shown here are "Mary and Martha," "Lion," "Large Angel," "Small Angel," "Lady With Bustle," "Mourning Doves," "Ram Resting," "Lady Holding Up Her Petticoat" and "Lady in Cloak." The exhibition will continue to Dec. 1.

WHALEN ELECTED WORLD'S FAIR HEAD

Becomes President on Full-Time Basis—Resigns All Outside Executive Posts

INDUSTRY'S AID ASSURED

Investment of $150,000,000 in Project Expected—Debenture Sale Reaches $27,829,500

Grover A. Whalen was elected yesterday president of the World's Fair Corporation on a full-time basis and now will devote his entire time to the affairs of the corporation, according to an announcement made by Mortimer N. Buckner, chairman of the executive committee.

Mr. Whalen, it was announced, has severed all his outside executive and administrative business responsibilities and will continue his corporate connections only as director of several companies. He has resigned as chairman of the board of the Schenley Products Company, one of the most important posts he held.

"Mr. Whalen's election is definite assurance to the industrial interests of the United States and foreign nations and the purchasers of World's Fair debentures that the present business policies of the Fair Corporation will be continued throughout the Fair and that the Fair will be open on scheduled time on April 30, 1939," the announcement said.

"Mr. Whalen will devote his entire time and attention to his duties as president and chief executive officer of the Fair Corporation and has severed all his outside executive and administrative business responsibilities.

"At the time of Mr. Whalen's election the board of directors adopted resolutions expressing its deep appreciation for the services which Mr. Whalen has rendered to the Fair Corporation and the community without compensation as president during the last two years. Under Mr. Whalen's direction the Fair Corporation has successfully closed its organization and planning period.

"The exposition is now assured of the largest participation by business and industrial interests of this country, by the States of the Union and by foreign interests and governments of any fair in the history of the United States."

The directors reported that the construction program of the Fair was ahead of schedule and that

Louise Dahl-Wolfe
William Edmondson working on some of his art in his home at Nashville

Russians in First Winter Flight Over Pole Search in Vain for a Trace of Levanevsky

Wireless to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

MOSCOW, Oct. 8.—For the first time in history a flight over the North Pole during the six months' Winter night was successfully accomplished yesterday by Soviet plane N-170. It was piloted by Mikhail Vodopyanoff, who has the title Hero of the Soviet Union, with a crew of eight, including the commander of the expedition, M. Sheveleff, who is similarly honored.

The plane left Rudolf Island at 3:21 A. M. yesterday, flew straight to the pole along the fifty-eighth meridian and radioed at 8:15: "We will have reached the pole in another eighteen minutes and have already begun to search at a height of 350 meters." Commander Sheveleff reported that the search was continued at an approximate height of 500 meters. At first the weather was clear but later the search was hampered by clouds. Three flares were dropped in the hope that some of the crew of Sigismund Levanevsky, missing Soviet flier, might light a signal bonfire.

In spite of the absence of moon or stars the plane landed successfully at Rudolf Island at 1:10 P. M. A new aerodrome had been prepared by I. P. Mazuruk, commander of one of the other planes in the Sheveleff expedition, on Georgeland, but this proved unnecessary. A supplementary expedition of four great four-motor planes, commanded by Ivan Chuknovsky, also a Soviet "hero" who rescued members of the Nobile polar flight in the airship Italia some years ago, left Moscow yesterday morning at 9 o'clock. It reached Archangel at 3:37 P. M. on the way to Rudolf Island to join Commander Sheveleff. They intended to land at the intermediary point of Amdurma but learned from polar stations there that as the result of a storm the landing field was flooded. It was decided therefore to land at Naryan-Mar instead.

As soon as the weather permits these ships will go to Rudolf Island, where it is planned that all eight planes will undertake "quartering flights" over the Polar Basin, where Levanevsky is supposed to have landed. Thus they will cover an area estimated at 100,000 to 150,000 square kilometers. Before leaving Moscow Chuknovsky published a statement of belief that the Levanevsky crew is still alive. There have been rumors which this correspondent has not been able to confirm that Soviet northern stations have received faint radio signals which, although indecipherable, justified hope that Levanevsky's partially repaired radio was attempting to communicate.

Figure 74. *New York Times*, Saturday, October 9, 1937.

Figure 75. José Clemente Orozco, *Negros colgados* from *The American Scene, Series I*, 1933-1934. Lithograph on paper, 12 11/16 x 8 7/8 in.

Figure 76. Walker Evans, *Cotton and Corn, Hale County, Alabama*, 1935 or 1936. Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

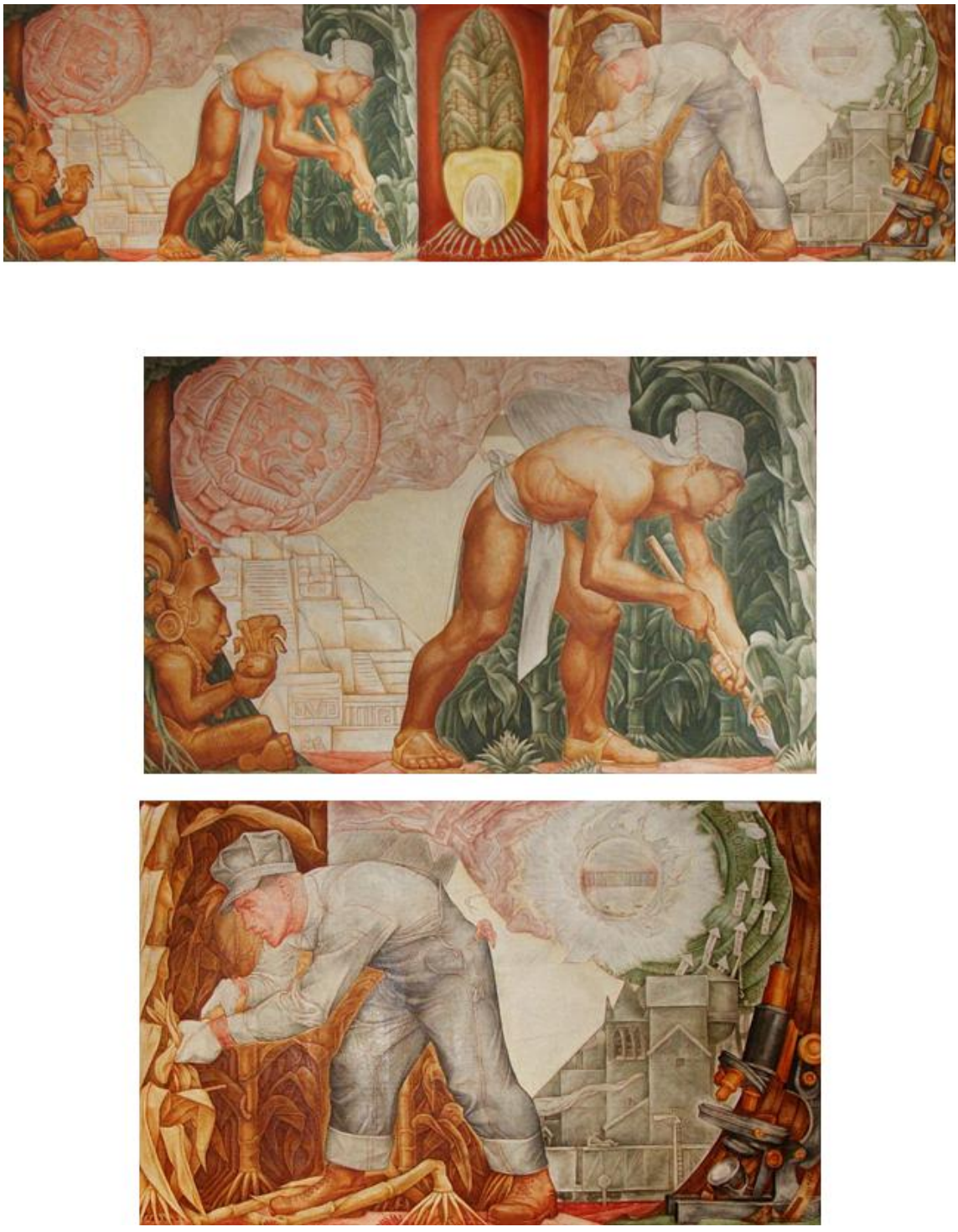

Figure 77. Lowell Houser, *Evolution of Corn*, 1938. Oil on canvas, 18 ft. 2 in. x 5 ft. 9 in. Ames, Iowa Post Office.

Figure 78. George and Jean Lewis, installation photograph of *Bill Traylor: People's Artist* at the New South, 1940.

Figure 79. George and Jean Lewis, installation photograph of *Bill Traylor: People's Artist* at the New South, 1940.

Figure 80. David Hammons, *House of the Future* (installation on America St.), 1991.

Figure 81. David Hammons, *House of the Future*, 1991.

Figure 82. Cover of *TIME* Magazine, 24 November 2008.

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